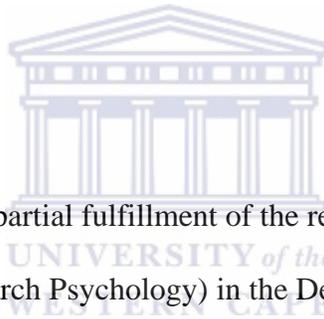


# **Aggression as a Form of Power with the Incarceration of Youth**

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A mini-thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Magister Artium (Research Psychology) in the Department of Psychology,  
University of the Western Cape.

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November 2006

## **ABSTRACT**

### **AGGRESSION AS A FORM OF POWER WITH THE INCARCERATION OF YOUTH**

This mini-thesis will examine the use of aggression by youth in Pollsmoor Prison during incarceration. Though the incarceration of children and youth is a problem internationally, it is particularly problematic in South Africa where these prison facilities are overcrowded and result in disturbing social practices. They are often at risk for assault, rape and other violent interactions, often within a structured and hierarchical prison gang system. The gang culture within prisons is a crucial factor contributing to its high levels of violence, and its examination is vital to the understanding of power and aggression as a form of survival in prison. Many of these juvenile offender population in South Africa come from the previously disadvantaged communities and often replicate the behaviours that they learn in prison in the communities they return to. A qualitative methodology was employed with the purposive sampling of participants from the juvenile offender sections of Pollsmoor Prison. A semi-structured interview was used to gather data. Data analysis was undertaken using thematic analysis. The study ensured that the strictest ethical principles were adhered to. Some of the major findings uncovered that fighting, gang activities were common among these youth. Sodomy was a daily occurrence but was always viewed as happening to someone else. Most participants were perpetrators of aggression. This was usually as a result of threats of danger within the hostile prison environment. As a result many participants have been victims of aggression. Prison gangs is a major contributing factor to the high level of violence among this population. Gang membership and activities have been linked to aggression, power, respect and even protection among these youth. These findings have shown that aggression is often used as a form of power with the incarceration of youth. Given the high number of juvenile offenders in prisons currently in South Africa, this study offers valuable insights into the use of violence and aggression and may contribute to programmes and policies aimed at ameliorating this phenomenon.

**KEYWORDS:** Youth, Aggression, Power, Incarceration, Prison, Violence, Gangs, Gang hierarchy, Survival, Respect

## DECLARATION

I declare that *Aggression as a Form of Power with the Incarceration of Youth* is my own work, that it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged as complete references.

**Natasha Hendricks**

Signed:.....

November 2006



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I hereby wish to thank and honour my loving mother and father, for being the greatest role models within my life. I thank you for all the sacrifices you have made throughout your lives to afford me the opportunity to reach for my dreams. As an adult, I realise just how true your words have become, for hard work is worth it in the end. Your unconditional love, support and encouragement has given me the freedom to passionately pursue my career. I have been blessed with parents who have understood and motivated both my strengths and weaknesses and always uplifted me to reach for my goals. This study has shown me the important role parents play within a child's life and I pay tribute to my own parents for giving me a solid foundation to develop into the person I am today.

To my grandmother who has always been there for me and still is, thank you for all your love, care and support and always showing how proud you are of me...words cannot explain how much it means to me. You have played a pivotal role in my growth and development from child to adult and I will always cherish these memories.

To my late grandmother, who was a pillar of strength within the family, your life experiences will always remain a motivating factor, giving me the determination to be who I want to be.

My loving brother and sister, though so young, you have and always will be an inspiration to me. I am so proud of all your achievements, you have motivated me to be the very best that I can be.

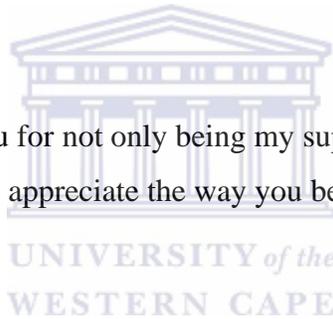
A heartfelt thank you to a very special person in my life, your understanding and support has made my achievements attainable and I will always appreciate your presence within my life. Your encouragement and motivation remains priceless to me.

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To Mr. Umesh Bawa, thank you for not only being my supervisor but also my mentor during this study. I will always appreciate the way you believed in me and I wish you all the best for the future.

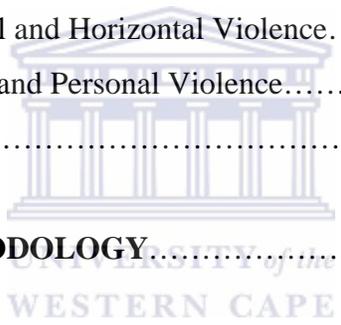


Finally, to all family, friends and colleagues who have supported and encouraged me throughout my studies, thank you for all your motivation.

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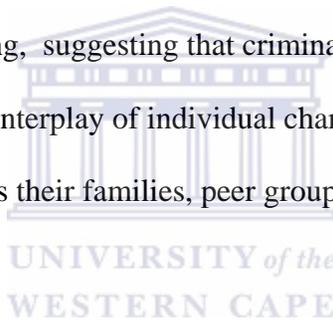


# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

The incarceration of children and youth is an international problem, which has become increasingly controversial. It is one of our most pressing social issues, with negative emotional, physical and economic effects felt throughout the communities in which it occurs (Tarolla, Wagner, Rabinowitz and Tubman, 2002). This is due to evidence found within empirical literature, which strongly supports a social-ecological (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) view of juvenile offending, suggesting that criminal behaviour is multidetermined by the reciprocal and dynamic interplay of individual characteristics and key social systems of these youths, such as their families, peer groups, schools and communities (Tarolla, et al., 2002).



Henggeler (1996), states that within several reviews it was found that criminal behaviour by youth are often influenced by factors on an *individual level*, such as drug abuse, low social conformity, low verbal skills, favourable attitudes towards antisocial behaviour; on the *family level*, such as lack of parental monitoring and discipline, conflict, maltreatment and lack of love and care; on the *peer level*, such as association with deviant peers, poor relationship skills; on the *school level*, such as drop out, poor academic performance, weak structure and chaotic environment of schools; on the *community level*, such as criminal subculture, frequent transitions and mobility, low social support from neighbours etc. These motivators on criminal behaviour are found within most

communities within the Western Cape, where the incarcerated youth population stem from, namely the Cape Flats.

Similar to many social problems in this country, the incarceration of youth has been influenced by the unique political conditions of South African society (De Ridder, 1996). During the Apartheid era blacks and coloureds were moved to the Cape Flats under the Group Areas Act in the 1970's (Davids, 2005). Due to these forced removals, people were relocated further from the city and away from employment opportunities, leading to a break down in family structures and an increase in crime (Davids, 2005). The discrimination and inequality imposed by the Apartheid regime, resulted in the Cape Flats areas remaining underdeveloped and under-resourced, which increased the high levels of unemployment for youth in particular (Prince, 2005).

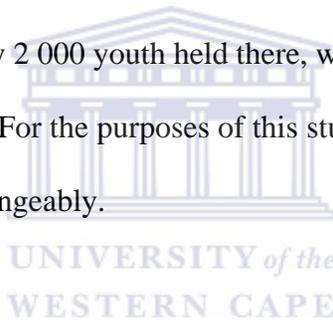
These conditions often led youth to join gangs or participate in criminal behaviour, as the gang provided them with a sense of belonging as well as opportunities for financial improvement and for gaining a sense of power, acceptance and purpose (Davids, 2005). Conditions within certain communities led to the increased number of criminal behaviour by youth, which often resulted in incarceration.

## **1.2 Prison Youth**

In South Africa, adolescents are defined as those persons between the ages of 10-19 years (Dickson-Tetteh & Ladha, 2000). The World Health Organisation (WHO) has also defined adolescents as persons in the 10-19 year age group and youth defined as the 15-24 year age group (Dickson-Tetteh & Ladha, 2000). These two overlapping groups were

combined into one entity, 'young people', between the ages 10-24 years (Dickson-Tetteh & Ladha, 2000).

Incarcerated youth consume a large proportion of child welfare, juvenile justice, special education and mental health resources (Tarolla et al, 2002). Within the South African prison system, a person who has committed a crime who is under the age of 18 is referred to as a juvenile offender (Dissel & Mnyani, 1995). However, due to the lack of facilities and resources, unbearable overcrowding conditions leads the prison system to categorise youth between the ages of 14 to 21 (Dissel & Mnyani, 1995). All of South African prisons are overcrowded with Pollsmoor Prison in Tokai, Cape Town, being one of the worst. There are approximately 2 000 youth held there, with the facility's capacity being for 1 111 only (Fagan, 2004). For the purposes of this study, the term juvenile offender and youth will be used interchangeably.



Adolescence is often defined as a transitory stage between childhood and adulthood, an influential period in which many life patterns are learned and established (Davids, 2005). In the tough communities, where the rubber hits the road, the youth rituals enacted daily are far older than the justice system itself. Elaborately, often unconsciously, and with tools, substances and attitudes dating to the dawn of our species, young people are engaged in rites of passage to adulthood with the central goal of respect (Pinnock, 1996). Wealth has institutionalised many rituals from childhood to adulthood, into formal ceremonies. Poverty catalyses those who do not have the resources to perform these ceremonies, into protracted lawbreaking or violence (Pinnock, 1996). This inevitably leads to the incarceration of these youth.

### 1.3 Prison Environment

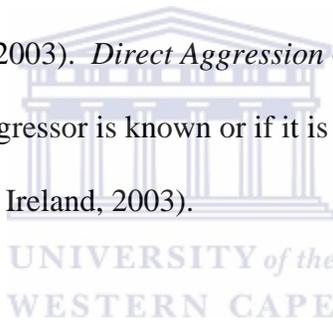
Youth in Pollsmoor Prison suffer various forms of deprivation with the most prominent feature of this environment being its high level of violence (Africa Watch, 1994). For the youth, incarceration is an outstanding and formative cut in their lives, which can hardly be understood by people from outside (Horst, 2005). The deprivation of liberty is especially devastating for youth because the loss of liberty and the unfriendly environment of prison is an experience, affecting the mind and feelings of the child, since violence and the law of the strongest, dominates the everyday life behind bars (Horst, 2005). Incarcerated youth are often exposed to an environment that possibly introduced them to a violent criminal culture or confirmed them in this path, a counter-productive situation from almost any criminological perspective (De Ridder, 1996).

Due to this adverse setting, inmate violence usually includes bullying, rape, assaults as well as coercive conformity within gangs (Africa Watch, 1994). According to Derrick Mdluli, previous ex-prisoner and national president of the South African Prisoner's Organisation for Human Rights, prisoners are raped every night and yet, it is an ignored problem within larger society (Booyens, Hesselink-Louw & Mashabela, 2004).

Rape is a sexual act imposed upon a non-consenting partner. Rape and sexual assault are crimes of violence in prison and are used to exert power or control over another person (Pelmos, 2003). The method of imposition is often violent, though it may be by threats or intimidation or abuse of positions of power (Pelmos, 2003). Factors that may contribute to rape in prison will be mentioned in this study in later sections.

## 1.4 Aggression

Juvenile aggression and violence affect society in a wide and penetrating manner (Loeber and Loeber, 1998). According to Ireland and Ireland (2003), two categories of aggression can be established within incarcerated juvenile offenders. *Indirect Aggression* includes subtle behaviours such as gossiping, ostracising and spreading rumours, in which the identity of the perpetrator or their aggressive intent remains hidden (Ireland & Ireland, 2003). This type of aggression may include *social manipulation*, where aggressors manipulate others to attack or harm the victim. It may also include *rational-appearing aggression*, where aggressors attempt to conceal their intent by using rational behaviours (Ireland & Ireland, 2003). *Direct Aggression* on the other hand, occurs when the identity and intent of the aggressor is known or if it is more explicit such as physical or verbal aggression (Ireland & Ireland, 2003).



These two types of aggression occur within prison on a daily basis. For the purposes of this study, aggression will be discussed in relation to the individual within a wider social complex. Moreover, a brief description of the concept of anger and how it relates to aggression will be outlined. Aggression among incarcerated youth is often linked to respect, power, gang formation, membership and activities. Thus, a discussion of these phenomena is pivotal to this study.

## 1.5 Gang Formation

The discussion of gang formation is vital in the understanding of its aggressive manifestation and how it contributes to the violent subculture associated with prison

(Haysom, 1981). It is usually within these gangs where members attain status and power inside prison through the use of aggressive and violent behaviours (Haysom, 1981).

According to Cowan (2003), children belonging to prison gangs carry the gang markings on their bodies and they talk the gang lingo with the fascinating dance with their hands when they speak, like all gangsters do.

Survival and self-preservation may override moral choices in the prison environment and the decision to join a prison gang at a young age may initially be a survival strategy, that escalates into a range of obligations and duties that stretch beyond the prison walls (Muntingh, 2005). However, within Pollsmoor Prison some of the youth are as tough as nails on the outside but on the inside they are often just like other children: they love their moms; they want a home; they want their own one day and they want to be good role models to their children (Cowan, 2003). The focus of the present study is the use of aggression as a form of power among incarcerated youth, which is usually displayed within prison gangs. Therefore, gang formation and involvement will be a key factor contributing to the literature within this study.

## **1.6 Power in Prison**

Prisons can be described as hostile and aggressive environments where the ability to stand up to those who threaten you, to use physical violence to protect yourself and to have a willingness to be tough and maintain one's position in the prison hierarchical order are important aspects of juvenile offender subculture (Ireland & Ireland, 2003). Researchers have found that aggressive prisoners receive both respect and power from their peers and that the victims are usually found at the bottom of the prison 'hierarchical

order' (Cornell, Petersen & Richards, 1991). Within Pollsmoor, as well as all of the other prisons in South Africa, the gangs, or as they refer to themselves, the 'men of the number' are organised in a hierarchically ordered quasi-military structure with the most powerful members at the top and the weaker members at the bottom (Haysom, 1981). Thus, for the purposes of this study, the dynamics and experiences of aggression and power among the incarcerated youth population will be examined.

### **1.7 Rationale of Study**

The use of aggression is closely related to status and power for juvenile offenders' survival within prison. Moreover, these aggressive behaviours are often played out through their involvement in prison gangs. The paucity of research in South Africa on this social problem within the criminal justice system remains an important motivation for this study. Furthermore, the current study will extend the research conducted by Hendricks (2004), in which an exploration of juveniles experiences of incarceration, showed how the prison environment often developed aggressive behaviour within these individuals for survival and coping purposes. Since aggression is an important feature of research within the hostile setting of prison, the current thesis would contribute substantially to those in contact with incarcerated youth.

### **1.8 Aims of Study**

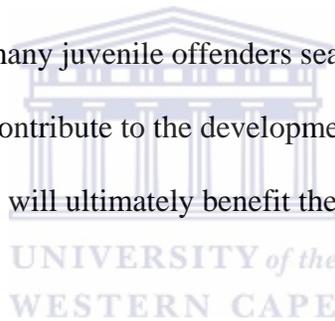
The aims of the study were:

- To explore how experiences of incarceration lends itself to greater expressions of aggression.

- To understand the perceptions of incarcerated youth, about gang formation and prison violence.
- To explore the dynamics of power among this incarcerated population.

## **1.9 Significance of Study**

The current juvenile offender subculture is identified for its violent and aggressive characteristics, which is evident within the prison gang hierarchical structure. This study may correct any misconceptions of prison violence and create a greater understanding of the aggressive lifestyles of so many juvenile offenders searching for power as a means of survival. This research could contribute to the development of programmes aimed at facilitating this problem, which will ultimately benefit the prison system as a whole.



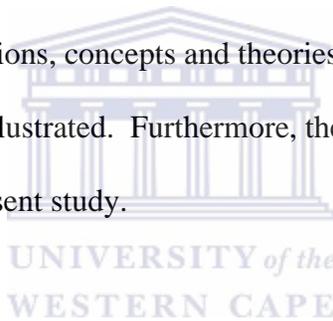
## **1.10 Theoretical Framework**

To explore how youth use aggression as a form of power within the violent environment of prison, the Fanonian Theory of Violence (1968) as well as Hussein Bulhan's Theory of Social Oppression (1985) will be adopted. These two theories discuss how during the Apartheid era, the black oppressed population developed an internalised feeling of inferiority. Fanon and Bulhan state, that a Manichean Psychology underlies human violence; discussing how vertical violence from the oppressor to the oppressed leads to horizontal violence among the oppressed. This theory could explain the violent and aggressive behaviours among incarcerated juvenile offenders, who were socialised within these disadvantaged communities in South Africa.

## 1.11 Chapter Organisation

Chapter one provides a detailed background of the phenomenon within the conducted study. Various concepts were defined and discussed in relation to the research topic being explored, as a means of providing the reader with a better understanding of aspects covered within the literature review. The rationale, aims and significance of the present study are outlined as well as a brief description of the theoretical framework, which has been adopted.

Chapter two reviews the related literature that is relevant to the aims of the present study. A detailed discussion of definitions, concepts and theories relating to the researched social phenomenon, has been illustrated. Furthermore, the theoretical framework is explained and linked to the present study.



Chapter three provides a comprehensive description of the methodological framework and methods utilised within this study. The research design, discusses the qualitative paradigm, which has been adopted within this study. An exact description of the participants and type of data collection tool are mentioned. Brief discussions of reflexivity, generalisability and the credibility of the study are given. A detailed description of how the data was collected and analysed are outlined. Furthermore, this chapter indicates the ethical considerations taken into account while conducting this study.

Chapter four illustrates the interpreted findings of the conducted semi-structured interviews and are discussed. Through the use of thematic analysis, various themes were

uncovered. These themes were then discussed by exploring whether they related to theories and concepts within the literature or not.

Chapter five gives the conclusion of the study by summarising the main findings. The limitations of the study are presented along with the recommendations for further, future research.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This section will discuss the factors contributing to criminal and aggressive behaviours leading to incarceration. A discussion on aggression and its manifestation will be outlined. Furthermore, a historical description will be given of the South African prison system and a discussion of the experiences of incarcerated youth. Aspects linked to prison violence will be highlighted by focusing on prison gang formation and involvement as a key factor. Bullying and prison rape will also briefly be highlighted. A detailed explanation of Fanon's Theory of Violence (1968) and Bulhan's Theory of Social Oppression (1985), will be utilised as a theoretical framework.

#### **2.2 Factors Contributing To Criminal and Aggressive Behaviours**

In South Africa, violent and aggressive crimes by youth are on the increase. Similar to many social problems within this country, the incarceration of children has been influenced by the unique political conditions in this society (De Ridder, 1996). The disintegration of families and communities via forced removals, the migrant labour system and the concentration of the black population into overcrowded areas during the Apartheid era, has generated extensive social problems within present society (De Ridder, 1996). Many youth from families thus affected by the oppressive system become

part of gangs in these communities, which in turn introduced them to a criminal lifestyle, putting them into conflict with the law (Pinnock, 1984).

Moreover, educational and socio-economic discrimination has been linked to theft as a survival strategy in certain sectors of the disadvantaged population (Africa Watch, 1994). This could lead one to postulate that most of the children currently in South African prisons are incarcerated as a result of poverty driven crime, exacerbated by the low socio-economic conditions found invariably within black communities (Muntingh, 1998).

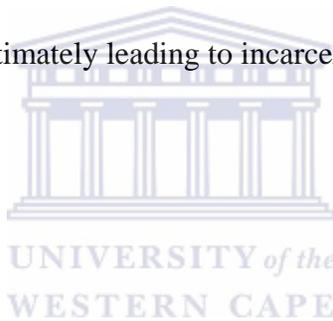
Furthermore, a study conducted with incarcerated violent youth in South African prisons by Wedge, Boswell & Dissel (2000), reflects how violence against them and other forms of abuse during their childhood influenced their violent criminal behaviours in later life. The current incarcerated generation, stems from a generation that was violently oppressed during the Apartheid era. Their childhood circumstances were often damaged by parents who were unable to cope with the stressors of their time, ultimately socialising the generation of today within a wave of crime.

According to McKay (2000), factors such as poverty, the experience of violence from authorities, frustration at seeing no future in a context of unemployment, increasing levels of substance abuse, fathers being away from their families, were all circumstances under which many of the incarcerated youth grew up in. Moreover, McKay (2000) further states that, poverty seems to lead to an increase in violence in young men. Low income for families causes depression in parents, and most importantly, mothers, who in turn, bring up depressed and angry children. Often a 'winner/loser' culture portrays owning possessions, as the most important symbol of social status and identity. This makes those

who do not have the necessary means, to feel socially excluded and not just poor, which creates conditions for aggression and violence (McKay, 2000).

These violent experiences, though painful, are often accepted as a routine part of life, mirroring the socially and politically disruptive times which juveniles had to live through in their early years (Wedge *et al.*, 2000). Due to the severity of economic deprivation and inequality in South Africa, explanations of violent, aggressive or criminal behaviours are often fairly mechanistic (McKay, 2000). Through these findings it is clear that violence within the disadvantaged communities, where a vast majority of incarcerated youth in this country come from, plays a contributing role in the formation of their various criminal behaviours, ultimately leading to incarceration.

### **2.2.1 Aggression**



Throughout the research literature, the terms violence and aggression are often used interchangeably. Aggression is a broader term that includes the entire spectrum of assertive, intrusive, or attacking behaviours, while violence may be considered a subset of aggression (Tate, Reppucci & Mulvey, 1995). Braine (1994) cited in Cohen, Hseuh, Russel and Ray (2005), offers a four component definition of aggression, which states that these behaviours are (a) intentional acts, with (b) the potential for harm, (c) committed by an individual in an aroused physical state and (d) perceived as aversive by the victim. The following section will display the function of aggression in relation to the individual. Thereafter, a description of the concept of anger in relation to aggression will be given.

### ***2.2.1.1 Aggression and the Individual***

Several current theories in the social sciences are relevant for expanding the study of children's aggression beyond consideration of individual characteristics of aggressor's and victims. These theories share the assumption that an individual is embedded within social systems, which have both direct and indirect influences on both behaviour and development (Cohen et al, 2005). Hinde (1992) in Cohen et al (2005), offers a hierarchy of social complexity that runs from physiological factors, to individual, to interactions between individuals, to relationships, to groups, to society.

Interactions are defined as interdependent behaviours in which the behaviour of one person serves, in turn, as a stimulus for and a response to, the behaviour of others (Cohen et al, 2005). Relationships are more complex than interactions, in that they connote a history of successive interactions between two people, as well as behavioural expectations for the future (Cohen et al, 2005).

Groups comprise multiple interacting individuals and multiple relationships and involve processes such as cohesion and the construction of social hierarchies (Cohen et al, 2005). A child's aggressor-victim relationship is influenced by the range and nature of social interactions experienced by each member of the dyad, as well as being influenced by the nature of the peer group, in which it is embedded. Each of these levels of social complexity is influenced by the physical environment and by socio-cultural values, beliefs and institutions. Therefore, it is safe to state that incarcerated youth consists of individuals with unique characteristics, embedded within levels of social complexity, such as the physical environment, namely prison.

Since anger is such an individual characteristic, the following section will discuss its relation to aggression.

### ***2.2.1.2 Anger and Aggression***

It has been proposed that aggression is often a consequence of anger arousal and many studies indicate anger as a significant predictor of aggression (Wood & Newton, 2003). Both anger and aggression have been shown to predict offending behaviour (Wood & Newton, 2003). Anger can be defined as a response to an aversive state consisting of both cognitive and physiological components. It is a normal and often functional response to negative situations, protecting self-esteem, instigating action, energising and defending individuals against psychological and physical harm (Wood & Newton, 2003). Anger can be destructive, physically and mentally harmful and can lead to the onset of various problems such as depression (Wood & Newton, 2003).

Anger may result from circumstances, where people feel that they have been unjustly provoked or violated, making it likely that angry individuals may believe that someone else is responsible for a negative event. Therefore, incarcerated youth are provoked or violated daily by many fellow prisoners, in various forms. This type of environment makes the development of anger flourish, leading to the inevitable psychological destruction of these youth. To understand the prison environment within a South African context, the following section will discuss this phenomenon from a historical perspective.

### **2.3 The South African Prison System – A Historical Overview**

It is not too long ago that the Republic of South Africa was not a democracy. Prior to the fundamental social and economic change with the first general democratic elections in 1994, prisons were a mirror image of the Apartheid system, which governed the country (Horst, 2005). The new government approved the final Bill of Rights, which came into force in 1997 (Horst, 2005). This Bill of Rights sets out the fundamental rights of the people of South Africa.

The Bill of Rights was a basis for the new Correctional Services Act, No. 111 of 1998, the prisoners rights guaranteed in the Bill of Rights were expanded upon in this new act (Horst, 2005). For many years South Africa did not have a separate body of legislation dealing especially with young offenders. According to Horst (2005), in 1995 South Africa ratified the United Nations Conventions on the rights of the child. Thereafter, the South African Law Commission undertook investigations into juvenile justice. The Child Justice Bill will be ratified as soon as possible and will affect the future of the rights of children in prison in South Africa.

Presently, not many special provisions exist to protect and train children in prison in South Africa and youth are subjected to the same regime as adults although they have to be treated differently. The South African Constitution states in Section 28 (1)(g) that juveniles, (persons under the age of 18 years) should not be detained in prison but only as a measure of last resort and only for the shortest appropriate period of time (Horst, 2005). Furthermore, when youth are detained, whether awaiting trial or after being

sentenced, they also have the right to be kept separately from other detained persons over the age of 18 years.

A further important juveniles' right is guaranteed in Section 28 (1)(b) and (c) of the Constitution, which states that every juvenile has the right to appropriate alternative care when removed from the family environment and to basic nutrition, shelter, health care and social services (Horst, 2005). Moreover, it must be ensured that juveniles remain in contact with their families through visits and other means. Section 19 (1)(a) of the Correctional Services Act provides that juveniles who are subject to compulsory education programmes must attend these programmes. Prison authorities must provide access to educational programmes.

According to Section 19 (2) of the Act, all juveniles in prison must also be provided with social work services, religious care, recreational programmes and psychological services (Horst, 2005). With a constitution such as this many people may think and believe that youth in prison have it quite easy and even demand harder forms of punishment on offenders. However, it is crucial for society to consider if these rights are being practiced within prisons before making such detrimental demands, which may affect the lives of many incarcerated youth. Therefore, the following section will portray the experiences of youth within a South African prison, to shed some light on the reality of this institution.

### **2.3.1 The Experiences for Youth in Prison**

Pollsmoor Prison is the railway station of Western Cape prisons. It is situated within a stone's throw of Cape Town's ghetto's, there is a great deal of flux, of movement, of

exchanges between the streets and the prison (Steinberg, 2004b). Like many other prisons within South Africa, the environment within which incarcerated youth have to serve their sentences or await trial, are often shockingly poor. The following section will outline a few of the characteristics of the prison environments within this country, with special reference to Pollsmoor Prison, since the present study was conducted there.

*a) Overcrowding*

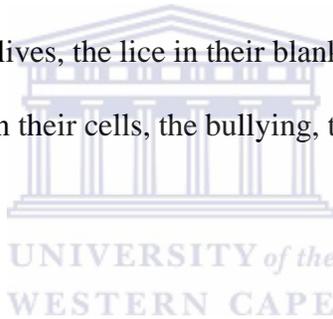
The problem of overcrowded cells is a serious problem especially in the juvenile section. The tendency in South Africa is towards large communal cells of up to 50 juveniles per cell. Cells are frequently overcrowded, containing sometimes twice as many juveniles as they were designed for (Horst, 2005). South Africa always had a problem with overcrowding in the past, but now more juveniles are in prison than there were in the early 1990's. Over the five year period from 1998 to 2003, a total of 382 juveniles under the age of fourteen were in prison. Of these 74 were sentenced and 308 were awaiting trial (Horst, 2005).

The current study was conducted at Pollsmoor Prison in Tokai, Cape Town. The Pollsmoor Management Area, consists of five centres. In total Pollsmoor has the capacity to accommodate 4 336 offenders but there are currently 7 795 offenders in Pollsmoor (Portfolio Committee Report, 2004). Youth under 18 years are accommodated in Section B4 (sentenced), and B5 (unsentenced). The youngest offender in B5 is 13 years of age. Within Section B4, accommodation is for 84 persons, but holds 118 youth, making it 140.47% overcrowded. Within B5 accommodation is for 147 persons but holds 169, making it 86.98% overcrowded (Portfolio Committee Report, 2004).

These statistics are shocking if one bears in mind that the constitution states that children, especially under the age of fourteen should not be sent to prison and that alternative forms of ‘punishment’ should be enforced.

***b) Prison Conditions***

The problem of overcrowding leads to many other problems ranging from the overutilisation of facilities and under-resourcing to social problems amongst the youth. In Pollsmoor Prison, youth often complain that sanitary facilities are filthy, the showers and toilets are blocked. According to De Villiers (1997), one can hardly imagine the petty humiliation of their daily lives, the lice in their blankets, their clothes stiff from dirt and sweat, the freezing nights in their cells, the bullying, the grey lumpy porridge as well as the stench of the latrines.



Sometimes they have to sleep on the concrete floor with a blanket only, no hot water and no facilities for washing clothes, broken windows and lights with insufficient medical treatment for the contagious diseases that are rife (Horst, 2005). These are all infringements of prisoners; basic rights. Furthermore, in the juvenile awaiting trial section, there are more people in one cell than beds. There is a shower, separated only by a blanket. Most prisoners just sit on their beds without doing anything and without having any privacy for 24 hours a day.

***c) Separation from Older Youth***

Normally, the prison authorities ensure that children are kept separately from adults, although children under the age of 18 are frequently to be found in cells with juveniles over this age (Horst, 2005). Africa Watch (1994), noted that the absence of segregation of youth by age, is particularly serious in the light of the disturbingly routine allegations of sexual abuse of juvenile prisoners.

***d) Education and Recreation***

Most prisons in South Africa including youth centres do not have schooling facilities, which means that the youth display extreme lethargy during the whole day. At Pollsmoor Prison, the juveniles have to register at the beginning of the year, otherwise they are not allowed to attend school, which is held for three hours a morning (Horst, 2005). There are also not enough places for all juveniles available and for juveniles awaiting trial no programmes at all are provided, so that they often lose a year or more of their education. Most of the youth at Pollsmoor do not attend any schooling or training programmes.

The sentenced offenders stated that they wanted to attend school but could not do so due to the lack of staff and facilities in Pollsmoor e.g. only one cell can attend school at a time. Youth stated that there was little opportunity to participate in sports activities. Youth awaiting trial identified that they had limited access to societal workers due to a shortage of social workers at the prison. Offenders complained about discipline by correctional officials and stated that when one person misbehaved all of them were punished (Horst, 2005).

In the morning, some juveniles participate in a Bible hour and afterwards a social worker teaches life skills. Juveniles have access to a very small library if they wish to read.

Youth are locked up in their cells for 23 hours of the day. The last meal of the day may sometimes be served as early as 11am to 2pm, while medical needs are supervised by one nurse, three times a week after breakfast (De Villiers, 1997). After 4pm they are alone and locked in their cells until 7am the following morning. Between 2pm and 3pm the juveniles are allowed free time in the courtyard, which has no facilities, under supervision. If no warders are available, they remain locked up for the whole day (De Villiers, 1997).

Often television is the only amusement in Pollsmoor and sometimes the removal of this medium is used as punishment and form of control (Horst, 2005). These poor education and recreation conditions in Pollsmoor and most prisons in South Africa, do not meet the requirements of the law and violates some of the most important basic rights of incarcerated youth.

*e) Loss of family*

When youth are incarcerated, the loss or time away from their families causes a great deal of stress. Since most of the youth population within prison come from poverty-stricken areas, families often cannot afford to visit their children, even if they really wanted to. Communities are affected by the high incarceration rates of their members, primarily young males, and this impact is felt in a number of ways. The fact that the imprisonment

rate of the South African coloured population is four times higher than national per capita imprisonment rate (1600 compared to 400 per 100 000 of the population), we can assume that at least some coloured communities literally see and feel the effects of current imprisonment trends as a regular and pervasive aspect of their lives (Muntingh, 2005).

Moreover, the manner in which family members interact with an incarcerated youth represents a complex set of relationships that are affected by issues, such as, length of prison term, distance to prison, travel costs and other practical factors (Muntingh, 2005).

Thus, incarceration not only affects the youth in prison but the disruption, insulation or isolation of the family as a result of imprisonment holds severe consequences for reintegration but also undermines the informal mechanisms of social control in a community (Muntingh, 2005). This clearly shows that the loss of family through incarceration has detrimental effects for both the youth and the community as a whole. The following section will focus on the prison environment, with special focus on violence and gang involvement.

## **2.4 Prison Violence and Gang Involvement**

The prison environment is an enclosed culture where a prisoner's world is very "small" and everything concerning his everyday functioning (reputation, status, power and privileges) matters (Hesselink-Louw, 2005). Possible antecedents that may trigger violent, aggressive behaviour within the individual include a lack of self-control, powerlessness, social isolation, frustration and involvement in gangs (Hesselink-Louw, 2005). Often, prison violence and gang involvement go hand in hand. These two problems will be focused on within the following sections.

### **2.4.1 Prison Violence**

The effects of imprisonment can be physically, mentally and emotionally devastating for any individual (Muntingh, 2005). However, it is also true that not all people react in the same way to imprisonment, and that it does not have the same effect on all people (Muntingh, 2005). Certain prisoners react in particular ways to the circumstances of prolonged confinement; relationships with family and friends can be severed and particular vulnerabilities and inabilities can come to the fore in the prison setting (Muntingh, 2005).

In addition, behaviour patterns that may emerge as a result of imprisonment can take on several forms such as aggression, social and emotional withdrawal and violence (Muntingh, 2005). It is often found that prison gangs are one of the main influences on the high levels of prison violence. According to McLachlan (1984) cited in De Ridder (1996), it is due to the very nature of prisons, overcrowding, isolation from family, boredom and powerlessness, that there is intense competition and rivalry within gangs themselves, as members fight for resources such as, tobacco, dagga or sex. Thus, assault, stabbing, theft and homosexual rape are commonplace within prison gangs. Since violence within prison is often influenced by prison gangs, the following section will portray a detailed discussion of this phenomenon.

### **2.4.2 Prison Gangs**

Over the past two decades, news of the strange world behind the bars of South Africa's prisons has been spilling out in dribs and drabs (Steinberg, 2004b). Among the things we

have learnt until now, is that the so-called “Number Gangs”, the 26’s, 27’s and 28’s, are about one hundred years old and that they originated in the jails, mine compounds and informal settlements of turn-of-the-century Johannesburg, and today they constitute a formidable force in every prison across the country (Steinberg, 2004b).

South African prisons are characterised and dominated by an elaborate system of gangs through which most inter-prisoner violence is mediated (Haysom, 1981). These prison gangs generally have a coherent national organisation and militaristic structure that mimic the old South African Apartheid system in general and the prison administration in particular (De Ridder, 1996). New recruits have to go through a strict orientation period where they learn the secrets and codes of conduct of gang life (Nott, Shapiro & Theron, 1990). Members are sworn to secrecy, which ensures that other gangs do not learn about their aims or strategies. Leaving a gang is often like signing a death warrant, since they are driven by the fear that a departing member may defect to a rival gang, thus they would rather kill him (Nott, Shapiro & Theron, 1990).

According to Steinberg (2004a) three gangs are known within South African prisons, each with their self-made philosophies of banditry and their collectively assigned roles. These three gangs are known as the 26’s, 27’s and the 28’s. The 26’s are to accumulate wealth acquired through cunning and trickery, which is to be distributed between the three gangs. The 28’s are to fight on behalf of all three gangs for better conditions for inmates and they are also permitted to have sex, in their own ritualised manner among themselves (Steinberg, 2004a). The 27’s are the guarantor of gang law and aim to keep the peace between the three gangs. They would right wrongs by wreaking revenge; when blood is spilled, they would spill blood in turn (Steinberg, 2004a).

Gangsterism is prevalent in South African prisons and has been for decades (Dissel, 1996). Most prisoners often feel that the prison authorities could not protect them against gang activities or violence (Dissel, 1996). In theory, gang membership is voluntary, but gangs are powerful and due to overcrowding conditions, violent coercive conformity could and usually is employed. Some forms of violence may include rape, assaults and bullying by other prisoners, usually gang members (De Ridder, 1996). Many young prisoners are forced to join gangs as a form of protection in prison (Dissel, 1996).

One of the most pernicious aspects of gang organisation is the system of coerced sexual partners and sodomy. Older or stronger gang members force or bribe younger prisoners to perform sexual favours (Dissel, 1996). Where sexual interactions have been reported on in prisons, they have been linked most explicitly to the specific workings of the 28 gang (Gear, 2001). The connection made between the 28's and sexual activity is unsurprising in the light of the fact that they consciously adopt homosexuality as a creed: the stated goal of the 28's is to pamper, protect and organise catamites or 'wyfies' (wives) and they have set laws to govern these sexual relations (Gear, 2001).

However, the 26's have also become known to practice homosexuality, even though it is not permitted within the laws of the 'Number Gangs' (Steinberg, 2004b). In prison, the boundaries between consensual and coerced sex are extremely blurred, since sex within this context is often highly coercive in nature even where it falls short of direct rape (Gear, 2001). Rape is one of the many forms of violence feared or experienced by many youth in prison. Younger prisoners are at a higher risk of being raped and thus, contributes to the urgency in separating them from older prisoners.

### **2.4.2.1 *Why youth join Prison Gangs***

According to Pinnock (1996), boys everywhere have a need for rituals marking a passage to manhood and if society does not provide them, they will inevitably invent their own. Youth gangs work, if they did not, young people would create something else (Pinnock, 1996). Of course, they are used for strong-arming people, smuggling drugs, protection and even murder, but this does not explain why their numbers continue to grow (Pinnock, 1996).

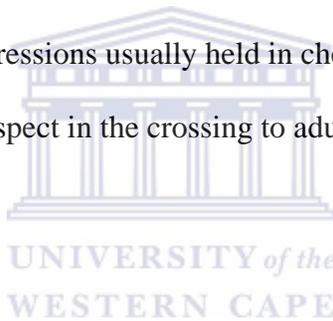
What clearly does not work is social retribution. There is good reason for this. In the tough suburbs, where the rubber hits the road, the youth rituals enacted daily are far older than the justice system itself. Elaborately, often unconsciously, and with tools, substances and attitudes dating to the dawn of our species, youth are engaged in rites of passage to adulthood, which have a central goal; respect (Pinnock, 1996).

While wealth has institutionalised many of these processes into brief, formal ceremonies, poverty catalyses them into protracted lawbreaking or violence. Colonial policies, which created generations of poor and socially dysfunctional families in South Africa, resulted in the breakdown of acceptable social mores and patterns of behaviour in the urban ghetto's of Apartheid. According to Pinnock (1996), when the turmoil receded after the 1994 elections, the new government was confronted with many highly politicised youth, but many more who were simply brutalised by ghetto conditions and state neglect at all levels. Thus, most post-apartheid youth generations are confronted with the desire to attain respect and power through the only way they know how, crime. The following

section will discuss the concept of power in relation to youth, gangs and the prison environment.

### **2.4.3 Power**

In our urban metropolises and cultures, rituals have been submerged in the struggle for survival and youth devise their own rites of passage. Thus, gangs are a contradictory and imagined community created to distance youth from the influence of parents or to make up for their absence, a bond of friendship, fear, protection or enmity, a badge of honour and a mark of the beast (Pinnock, 1996). On the volatile streets of the ghetto's there is an ever present danger that aggressions usually held in check by social pressures, may break free and the search for respect in the crossing to adulthood takes on larger-than-life proportions (Pinnock, 1996).



In this atmosphere police attention, arrest or prison, become a rite of passage through the hallways and rooms of the enemy into the bosom of the admiring gang. In the desperation of the streets, peer admiration has a high value and the trickle-down from successful crime syndicates keeps the door from the wolf of poverty (Pinnock, 1996). The explosive impact of bearing down retributively on youth undergoing a rite of passage, is likely to produce consequences that could keep the army in the ghetto's into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, since violence breeds violence (Pinnock, 1996).

A study conducted by Redding (2000) states that in order for youth to cope with prison life, daily survival required finding ways to fit into the prison culture by accepting violence as a part of life and becoming violent youth themselves. This finding links to a

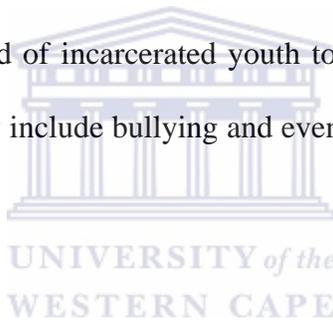
case study formulated by Hesselink-Louw (2005), where a shy first time prisoner was raped by members of the 26 gang, leaving him with feelings of revenge. He ultimately joined the 28 gang to alleviate his feelings of hatred, isolation, for protection against the 26 gang, attention, acceptance, support and other luxuries (Hesselink-Louw, 2005). Furthermore, gang membership has become an important aspect of his life, where his position as a 'general' in the gang allows him to make important decisions concerning gang activity, as well as giving him respect, power and status within prison (Hesselink-Louw, 2005).

Research suggest that gangs become new homes for prisoners who often become victims of gang violence, while already experiencing the stress associated with incarceration, such as being away from ones family (Alexander, 2000). Since juveniles are exposed to correctional institutions and criminal cultures where inmates commit crimes against each other, prisons may socialise a wayward offender into a true career criminal (Redding, 2000).

In a study that interviewed violent juvenile offenders about how they cope with prison life, Eisikovits and Baizerman (1983) cited in Redding (2000), reported that daily survival required finding ways to fit into the inmate culture. Juveniles experienced difficulty with authoritarian relationships with adult inmates and adjusting to prison meant accepting violence as a part of daily life and becoming even more violent youth. A prisoners experience is from the outset an experience of being violently dominated and is coloured from the beginning by the fear of being violently treated (Redding, 2000).

Juveniles in prison reported that much of their time was spent learning criminal behaviour from other inmates and that there was pressure to prove their toughness through aggression (Redding, 2000). Force, intimidation and threat from prison gangs are the norm, along with overcrowding and starkly inadequate living conditions and significant physical and psychological stresses of prison life (Redding, 2000).

It has often been stated that incarceration increases crime rates and in most instances prisons has been referred to as 'universities of crime'. Consedine (1999), states that prison hardens prisoners in their attitudes, making them more bitter against society, and may set them up emotionally and socially, to perform horrendous acts of violence. The literature depicts the great need of incarcerated youth to cope with their experiences in prison. These experiences may include bullying and even rape, which will be focused on in the following section.



#### **2.4.4 Bullying and Rape in Prison**

Hesselink-Louw (2005), states that, bullying behaviour is referred to as peer victimisation involving physical, emotional and/or verbal abuse. It constitutes an imbalance of power, a lack of concern on the part of the bully for the feelings of the victim as well as a lack of compassion. Moreover, bullying includes the abuse of power through repeated aggressive behaviours towards the victim (Rapp-Paglicci, Roberts & Wodarski, 2002).

Bullying may be experienced daily by many youth within the prison walls. Where gangs and groupings are rife, bullying may flourish in the quest for power and control through victimisation. The violent acts of gang rape and sodomy may also be linked to bullying.

The following section will discuss rape within prison in more detail, to give the reader an idea of the relevance of this concept within the current study.

While rape of males is a serious problem in the community, it is in the institutions of confinement, such as prisons, that male rape is most common, even an accepted part of institutional life (Pelmos, 2003). In a study carried out at a South African juvenile correctional institution, the findings of a voluntary questionnaire indicated, that roughly 45% of juveniles were engaging in sodomy (Gear, 2001). However, levels of sexual activity may vary from one institution to another.

An assumption that many outsiders may make is that sex in prisons are often carried out through acts of rape. However, the literature suggests that while this is true, sex also takes place in other types of circumstances, which vary in their level of coerciveness, from circumstances which directly resemble rape to others which may appear to be primarily consensual in nature (Gear, 2001). Sex is currency in prison and a crucial component of the intricate systems of power (Gear, 2001). It may be exchanged for small benefits, such as a cigarette or for basic rights such as food or protection against potentially life-threatening situations (Gear, 2001).

It is also stated that coerced sex in prison is not referred to as rape by the prisoners but as the “turning out” of a person (Booyens, Hesselink-Louw & Mashabela, 2004). This is a non-sexual description of an act of conquest and emasculation of the victim, whereby the victim is regarded as weak and not worthy of respect from those who are ‘men’ (Booyens *et al.*, 2004).

The literature has shed some light on the major concepts and constructs of incarcerated youth. It has depicted the relevance of aggression, violence and power within prison.

The juvenile offenders display of violent and aggressive behaviour as a means of attaining power during incarceration, may be explained by Fanon's Theory of Violence (1968).

## **2.5 Theoretical Framework**

In order to explore how juveniles use aggression as a form of power within the violent setting of prison, Frantz Fanon's Theory of Violence (1968) as depicted in Hussein Abdilahi Bulhan's Theory of Social Oppression (1985) has been adopted as a theoretical framework. According to Fanon, violence is integral to social relations and conditions (Bulhan, 1985). Fanon's theory was conceptualised during the colonial era, where he analysed the psycho-affective injuries of the oppressed societies and the defensive mechanisms they adopted (Bulhan, 1985). During the Apartheid era in South Africa, the white minority maintained all the power by dehumanising and oppressing the black majority. This led to the internalisation of a feeling of inferiority and less self-worth by the oppressed communities.

### **2.5.1 Fanon and Oppression**

Oppression is the global bane, the ubiquitous human dilemma, since it does not only occur among 'races' but flourishes between people of different genders, ages, incomes, nationalities, religions, physical size, education, in sexual relations and institutions (Dane, 1994). Indeed, little if any cultural apparatus is devoid of this violence. Fanon

declares that the pervasive violence of the colonial structure of Apartheid has so destroyed individual and cultural integrity, that it can only be retrieved by violent confrontation (Dane, 1994).

So-called “cleansing-violence” is first needed for the blacks to regain their selfhood, which entails rejecting the oppressor’s culture, language and cultural apparatus, so that hope and dignity can be restored (Dane, 1994). Thereafter, “counter-violence” follows to confront and dismantle the original violence of colonial institutions (Dane, 1994). Thus, Fanon articulates the alienation and pain of the colonised, the crippling economic, cultural and psychological symptoms of oppression and importance of fighting to overthrow domination (Dane, 1994).

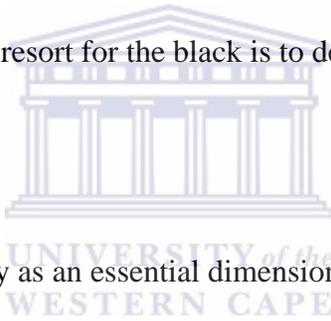
Fanon (1968), claims that the first facet of the colonial mindset to be rejected by the colonised in the event of revolution is individualism (Murphy, 2003). This is due to the fact that colonialism justifies its inhumanity with reference to a collective stereotype of the colonised as other, savage, inhuman and simultaneously refuse the concrete bonds existing between group members (Murphy, 2003). Thus, Fanon was interested in how the shame and self contempt that result from the experience of racial stereotyping, may manifest as intra-group violence (Murphy, 2003).

This is because in a colonial world whose racist logic dictates that only the embrace of an oppressive and inferior cultural stereotype or the adoption of the coloniser’s culture, is sufficient to secure identity, other options must be generated to rupture this “infernal-circle” (Murphy, 2003). It is only the power to create meaning and value for one-self that provides a remedy to what Fanon names “collective auto-destruction” of the colonised

(Murphy, 2003). However, it is this double bind that Fanon (1968) names an “infernally circle”, which motivates his description of double alienation, where one is faced with equally deplorable options of embracing the culture of the coloniser or falling back into an identity that has been dehumanised (Murphy, 2003).

### **2.5.2 Intra-group Violence**

According to Fanon (1968), it appears as though violence amongst the colonised is a postponement of the decision to raise arms against the oppressor and it is this wilful avoidance that motivates the enactment of violence against those with whom one most closely identifies, since the last resort for the black is to defend his personality vis-à-vis his brother (Murphy, 2003).



Fanon (1968) looks at proximity as an essential dimension of violence. The “collective auto-destruction” of which he writes is rendered as a symptom of the violence originally enacted against the colonised (Murphy, 2003). In essence there is a reflexive destruction of the community. Violence in group being is not simply a function of the individual’s thematisation within the group, but the consequent disavowal and denigration of these collective ties, that is accomplished in the coloniser’s insistence on propagating the alleged virtue of individualism (Murphy, 2003).

Beyond the violence that is enacted through the pernicious categorisation of the colonised, there is the violence that occurs when the very bonds of collectivity are eroded, manipulated and abused at the hands of the coloniser (Murphy, 2003). If violence escalates as the ties of collectivity are made more salient, there is an implied

tension in proximity. When it is the very ties that bind one to others, that are used to justify oppression, those bonds themselves become the source of anxiety and conflict.

There is more at stake here than the internalisation of oppressive norms and their reproduction. Beyond the racist denigration of a collectivity, the colonial celebration of individualism compromises the very fabric of collectivity. This deprives the colonised of subjectivity not only via the deliberate proliferation of a racist imaginary, but through the constant destruction of the communal ties necessary for the survival of the subject (Murphy, 2003). Through the eradication and the manipulation of those communal bonds, the coloniser essentially displaced the anxiety and rage that would rightfully have been directed against them.

### **2.5.3 Fanon's Vertical and Horizontal Violence**



Furthermore, Fanon (1968) believed that a Manichean Psychology underlies human violence and oppression (Bulhan, 1985). A Manichean view divides the world into compartments and people into different species, based on opposites such as good vs. evil, beautiful vs. ugly and white vs. black. This division derives from and reinforces violence (Fanon, 1968). Fanon (1968), also postulated that the constant illumination of the segregation line fosters further violence in the oppressed. He expressed the belief that *vertical violence* from the oppressor to the oppressed leads to *horizontal violence* among the oppressed (Bulhan, 1985).

This theory definitely links to the current study, where prison is usually filled with black offenders due to the socio-historical context of South Africa. Moreover, prison gangs

were formulated during the Apartheid era, in order to fight the oppressive authorities (Steinberg, 2004b). However, the unbearable living conditions as well as the psychological factors mentioned by Fanon (1968), led the oppressed prison population to resort to aggression and violence against each other for survival. The gang system is currently still practiced in South African prisons, thus contributing to the high level of violence within these correctional facilities.

#### **2.5.4 Structural, Institutional and Personal Violence**

Fanon (1968), also states that violence occurs at a personal, institutional and structural level (Bulhan, 1985). *Personal Violence* is a phenomenon of dyad, where one can identify a specific perpetrator whose aims can be verified and a victim whose injuries can be assessed (Bulhan, 1985). *Institutional Violence* occurs within microsocial systems such as prisons, mental institutions and the family (Bulhan, 1985). *Structural Violence* is a feature of social structures, which is inherent in the established modes of social relations, distribution of goods and services and legal practices of dispensing justice (Bulhan, 1985). Individuals are socialised into it as victims or perpetrators and, in the absence of fundamental change, they play out their ascribed roles (Bulhan, 1985).

These three levels of violence can undoubtedly be linked to the life story of each black South African prisoner, where institutional violence acts as the mediator for both personal and structural violence within their individual development and experiences. Oppression and one of its expressions, racism, legitimise structural violence, rationalise institutional violence and impersonalise personal violence (Bulhan, 1985). In a situation in which oppression spans generations, the violence to which it owes its origin and

sustenance is masked (Dane, 1994). The law, media, education, religion, work relations, environment and the whole ensemble of cultural and material arrangements of society remain infused with violence, which becomes harder to discern, the longer one lives under this condition of oppression (Dane, 1994).

### **2.5.5 Fanon and Prison**

The racial division seen in the shocking numbers of blacks incarcerated in America, continues to prove the lie of the country's multi-ethnic democracy (Gibson, 1999). Despite the growth of a black middle class, the ratio between a black man receiving a college diploma and receiving a prison sentence, is a staggering 100 to 1 (in 1993 23, 000 black men got diplomas, while 2. 3 million were incarcerated (Gibson, 1999). Translating the shocking characteristics of these figures into what Fanon called the "lived experience of the black" indicate, that black life is qualitatively different to that of white.

For the black, prison operates not as a threat, or a spectacle to scare others, but a direct reality (Gibson, 1999). In these cases the state's hegemony rests not on a whole series of relations we expect in "civilised" society, but on pure violence. Fanon (1968) views colonial society as a world where black masses are hemmed in a world strewn with prohibitions. A violent world that follows the black home, enters into every pore, a violence drummed into his head, that aims to transform the black into an animal (Gibson, 1999). Fanon's theory is extremely relevant to the present study and a more in depth discussion of this statement will be given in later sections.

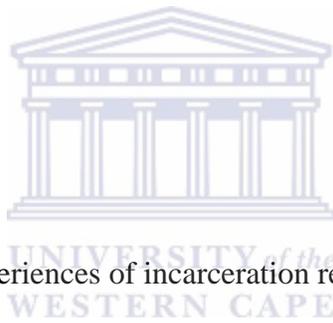
## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

This section focuses on the research methodological procedures, adopted to conduct this study. The aims, research design, sample, data collection tool as well as the data analysis will be discussed. Ethical considerations will be highlighted, due to the sensitivity and difficulty in exploring this social issue.

#### 3.2 Aims of Study



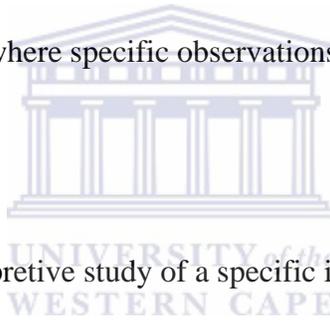
- To explore how experiences of incarceration result in greater expressions of violence. Themes may include individual coping styles of youth during incarceration; how negative experiences in prison may lead to aggressive behaviours.
- To understand the perceptions of youth about gang formation and prison violence. Themes may include views on gang formation and participation; views on the role of gangs in prison; what they view as the causes of prison violence.

- To examine the dynamics of power among this incarcerated population.  
Themes may include the views of youth on how aggression leads to power in prison; who is viewed as a powerful prisoner.

### **3.3 Research Design**

This study has adopted a qualitative paradigm, since it is concerned with exploring peoples life histories or everyday behaviour and experiences (Silverman, 2000).

According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), a qualitative design uses holistic methods of gathering information, involves direct personal contact with the participants of the study and includes inductive logics, where specific observations is led toward general patterns for the purpose of analysis.



Qualitative research is an interpretive study of a specific issue or problem, in which the researcher is central to the sense that is made (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). This method yields “insider” knowledge that is rich, contextual and deep, concerning many interrelated variables, which is useful for understanding particular cultures, such as the prison subculture (Bhana & Kanjee, 2001).

Thus, much focus is placed on the context and integrity of the material collected (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Therefore, qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the

world visible and these practices, ultimately, transform the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

### **3.4 Sample**

Participants for this study were recruited through purposive sampling, within the juvenile section of Pollsmoor Prison in Tokai, Cape Town. Purposive sampling allows the researcher to select unique cases that are especially informative, such as aggressive youth (Neuman, 2000). The sample consisted of 12 coloured male youth, who experienced incarceration within this particular prison for different durations of time. All the participants were between the ages of 14-17, which is known as the period of early adolescence within Erikson's Stage Theory (Santrock, 2004).

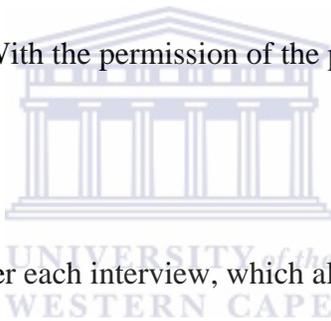
This study has placed attention on this age group, since adolescence is believed to be a challenge, as it is a period of change on a physical, sexual, psychological and cognitive level (Tshiwula, 1998). Erikson describes adolescence as a period where there is a crisis, as the person is confused in finding out who he is (Santrock, 2004). It is often during this crisis that some individuals search for answers in delinquent behaviour, since they are pressurised to achieve the attitudes and beliefs needed for effective participation in society (Tshiwula, 1998)

### **3.5 Procedures and Data Collection**

Permission to undertake research within the prison was sought and approved by the authorities, via a written letter. This was done through numerous visits with prison staff

at the juvenile sections at Pollsmoor Prison. A semi-structured interview of approximately one hour was adopted to conduct this study. Interviews with the participants who agreed to partake within the study, were arranged by the prison staff. Interviews took place in a small office at the prison, where participants could feel safe to air their views. The participants were allowed to speak both English and/or Afrikaans throughout the interviews.

Before the interviews were conducted, the participants were informed about the nature and objectives of the research study. The researcher's background research training was mentioned to assure the participants that the interviewer's skills and ethical considerations were ensured. With the permission of the participants', the interview was tape-recorded.



A short debriefing was held after each interview, which allowed participants to speak about feelings and emotions that may have been evoked through the research questions. If necessary, participants were encouraged to seek professional help, through the use of the social worker within prison. Finally, participants were thanked for their participation and they were assured that arrangements would be made to share the research findings with them.

A semi-structured interview allows the researcher to guide the process, while giving the participant enough space to steer it in a particular direction (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). The central task of interviewing with a semi-structured questionnaire, is to comprehend the essence of the individual, such as his/her emotions, motivations and needs (Chirban, 1996). The purpose of the qualitative research interview has been

depicted as the description and interpretation of themes in the participants' lived world (Kvale, 1996).

This type of interview encourages interaction between the researcher and participant and attempts to understand, how individuals experience their life worlds and the way they make sense of what is happening to them (Huysamen, 1994). At the most basic level, qualitative interviews are conversations (Kvale, 1996). Moreover, this type of interview allows the participant to express what is meaningful or significant to him or her, using his or her own words, rather than being limited to predetermined categories, thus the participant may feel more relaxed and truthful (Kvale, 1996).

To work most reliably with the words of participants, the researcher has to transform those spoken words into a written text to study. According to Seidman (1998), the primary method of creating text from interviews is to tape-record the sessions and to transcribe them. However, qualitative interviews are more subjective than quantitative methods because the researcher decides which quotes for specific examples to report (Davids, 2005).

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

Numerous analytic traditions fall under the umbrella of interpretive analysis, such as phenomenology, grounded theory and thematic analysis. Thematic Analysis will be utilised to analyse the collected material for the purposes of this study. This type of analysis identifies patterns in individuals' accounts of their feelings, perceptions and

understanding (Halliwell & Dittmar, 2003). First and foremost, the interviews were transcribed from which patterns of various experiences could be highlighted.

Thematic analysis is a search for themes that emerge as being important to the description of the specific phenomenon (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The process involves the identification of themes through carefully reading and re-reading the research material. It is a form of pattern recognition within the material, where emerging themes become the categories for analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

Thematic analysis is described as a logically connected way of organising or reading some interview material, in relation to a set of specific research questions (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor and Tindall, 1994). Three related processes were used when analysing the qualitative data namely: describing, classifying and connecting (Aronson, 1994). Firstly, the participants' meanings and experiences are described, which increases insight into the research topic. The goal of description is the representation of social reality through the eyes of the participants.

These patterns of experiences and meanings may be classified into themes. Themes are defined as units from patterns such as conversation topics, recurring activities, meanings and feelings, which are identified by combining experiences, considered meaningless if viewed alone (Aronson, 1994). If one participant experiences links to that of another, these patterns are connected to form sub-themes (Aronson, 1994).

Lastly, the researcher builds a valid argument for choosing themes, by referring back to existing literature. Good thematic analysis focuses on the research question, uses

relevant information from the transcripts and communicates the richness of the participant's experiences. Themes that emerge from the participants stories are pieced together to form a picture of their collective experience. Once the literature is interwoven with the findings, the story that the interviewer constructs is one that stands with merit (Aronson, 1994).

### **3.7 Reliability and Validity of Qualitative Research**

The qualitative response to the issue of reliability and validity, is to require researchers to demonstrate, that what they do, is fit for their research purpose (Arksey & Knight, 1999). Qualitative researchers have rejected the framework of validity and reliability, since these concepts are commonly utilised within quantitative research. Trochim (2002), states that qualitative researchers argue for different philosophical perspectives, for judging the quality of their research. Guba and Lincoln (1985), have proposed principles offered as an alternative to more traditional quantitative criteria, in judging the dependability of qualitative research. These four principles consists of the following:

*Credibility* is the qualitative equivalent for the conventional concept of internal validity (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). This criterion involves, ensuring whether the findings of the qualitative research, is credible and thus, believable, from the perspective of the participants. Qualitative researchers' aim to understand a specific phenomenon, experienced through the eyes of the participants. Therefore, the participants become the pivotal judges of the credibility of the findings.

*Transferability* is the qualitative equivalent for the conventional concept of external validity (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). This criterion involves, ensuring the extent to which the findings of the research can be transferred or generalised, to other research contexts or settings. It is the researcher's duty to improve transferability within a study, by giving a detailed description of the context and various assumptions of the research area.

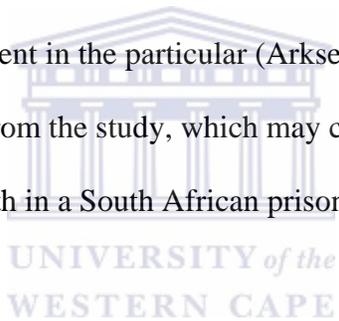
*Dependability* is the qualitative equivalent for the concept of reliability (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). This criterion involves, the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that he/she is constantly aware of the consistent changing of the research context, within which research occurs. The researcher's duty is to describe how changes within the research context, may have affected the research process.

*Confirmability* is the qualitative equivalent for the conventional concept of objectivity (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). This criterion involves, ensuring how well the findings of the study could be confirmed by others. The researcher may do this by constantly checking the research material, after he/she has documented them.

Qualitative researchers are therefore, encouraged to articulate their findings in such a manner, that the logical processes by which they were developed, are accessible to a critical reader, the relation between the actual research and the conclusions are explicit and the claims made in relation to the research are rendered credible and believable (Thorne, 2000).

### **3.8 Generalisability**

Most discussions of generalisation are about the conditions under which researchers can claim, that findings from a sample are likely to hold good for a population (Arksey & Knight, 1999). In qualitative research, especially if it involves one case or study, or is an action research project, the researcher may be reluctant to suggest that it is wise to generalise to a population (Arksey & Knight, 1999). Generalisability relates to the extent to which the interpretive account can be applied to other contexts than the one being researched. The generalisability of the findings of the present study, was limited given the small sample size. However, that does not mean that no generalisation is possible, since the general is always present in the particular (Arksey & Knight, 1999). Thus, valuable information accrued from the study, which may contribute to the general literature on aggression by youth in a South African prison.



### **3.9 Reflexivity**

Reflection means thinking about the conditions for what one is doing, investigating the way in which the theoretical, cultural and political context of individual and intellectual involvement, affects interaction with whatever is being researched, often in ways difficult to become conscious of (Alvesson & Skolberg, 2000). When we reflect, we try to ponder upon the premises for our thoughts, observations and use of language.

According to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999), feminist social scientists insist upon recognising the shared human attributes of research and subject, they are self-conscious of the role their identification or dis-identification with subjects might play in the

research process. It was acknowledged that the researcher's presence in the research process may have had some influence on the data collected. The sample for the current study, live in a hostile environment with little trust. Thus, being a female researcher it is important to establish some rapport with ones participants before the research process, in order to gain their trust.

This was done by visiting the prison and getting to know the participants before the interviews were conducted. Furthermore, my previous experience working with juvenile offenders, may have had an influence on the outcome of the research process. The researcher was equipped with necessary tools to engage with the participants on their level, as much as possible.

### **3.10 Ethical Considerations**



Exploring how youth use aggression as a form of power during incarceration is an extremely sensitive and dangerous procedure. Due to the closed prison setting and ritualised gang rules, the ethical issues of research are crucial in this study.

Confidentiality was ensured and informed consent was sought from the participants, and the prison authorities acted as guardians for the youth as all of their parents were inaccessible at the time of the study. Participation in the study was voluntary, and the right to withdraw from the research at any time was guaranteed. Furthermore, anonymity was also ensured. In the event of any traumatisation of any participant as a consequence of the research process, counselling sessions were arranged when needed, by referral to the appropriate counsellors and psychologists.

### **3.11 Conclusion**

This section has outlined the major methodological procedures utilised within the present study. The following chapter will outline the interpreted findings of this study and give a discussion of the themes in relation to relevant literature as well as Fanon's (1968) theory of violence.



## CHAPTER 4

### INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 Introduction

This section will illustrate the findings of the present study in the form of various themes. Through the use of thematic analysis, the following themes were uncovered within the findings. Thereafter, the themes were interpreted and discussed by linking it to the relevant literature. The main themes, which were relevant to Fanon's Theory of Violence (1968) were discussed. Lastly a summary of the discussed findings was given.

#### 4.2 Good vs. Bad Experiences of youth in Prison

All of the participants within this study have been in prison for various lengths of time, some long and others short. However, it was found that all participants had bad experiences of being in prison.

##### 4.2.1 *Bad Experiences by youth in prison*

##### 4.2.1.1 *Sodomy*

Sodomy was viewed as the most common bad experience within prison. Most had experienced witnessing other boys being sodomised in prison. An interesting realisation however was the fact that, though sodomy was witnessed on a daily basis, the participants

never spoke about actually experiencing this happening to them. The following extracts are responses from participants within the study, where sodomy was perceived as one of the bad experiences of incarceration.

*“The bad stuff, yor!!...it’s a lot of bad stuff man. Stabbings, sodomising...any kinda stuff...it happens every day.”* (Participant 1)

*“Yes. Other boys did sodomise other boys.”* (Participant 4)

The following participant expresses his fear of being sodomised, after he witnessed a boy being sodomised by another boy.

*‘n Ander laaitie het een laaitie verkrag in die kamer, sodomise...ek is bang vir die laaities.’* (Participant 6)

[“A other boy raped one boy in the room, sodomise...I am afraid of these boys.”]

(Participant 6)

These experiences by the participants clearly show that sodomy and rape in prison is extremely rife. This can be linked to the findings by Pelmos (2003), who stated that rape of males is a serious problem in the community, and that it is in the institutions of confinement, such as prisons, that male rape is most common, even an accepted part of institutional life.

The following participant however, mentions sodomy, but clearly does not view it as being an aggressor-victim relationship, since he mentions that they (boys) sodomise each other.

*“Ek voelie nog le... lekker hier, hier in die gevangenis. Die rede hoekom ek se dissie lekker by die plekkie, die laaties, hulle knou mekaar baie af, hulle sodomise me...mekaar...”*

(Participant 8)

[“I don’t still feel ni...nice here, here in prison. The reason why I say it’s not nice by this place, the boys, they fight with each other a lot, they sodomise ea...each other...”]

(Participant 8)

There is a wide assumption that all sexual acts within prison are classified as rape. Even though this may be true, the above statement made by one of the participants, can be linked to the findings of Gear (2001), who proposes that sex among incarcerated youth may also take place in other types of circumstances, which vary in their level of coerciveness, from circumstances which directly resemble rape to others which may appear to be primarily consensual in nature.

Another astonishing finding was that most of the participants who mentioned the act of sodomy, always spoke about witnessing it happening to others and never them. This could be due to the stigma connected to the act of sodomy within prison, where the male victim is often seen as being emasculated. This finding may be linked to the literature, whereby it is proposed, that coerced sex in prison is not referred to as rape by the prisoners but as the “turning out” of a person (Booyens, Hesselink-Louw & Mashabela, 2004). This is a non-sexual description of an act of conquest and emasculation of the

victim, whereby the victim is regarded as weak and not worthy of respect from those who are ‘men’ (Booyens *et al.*, 2004).

#### 4.2.1.2 *Fighting*

Most participants also stated that fighting within prison was one of the main bad experiences. Many, if not all participants had experienced either witnessing prisoners fighting or being victims of fighting. The following extracts are examples of some of the participants within this study, relating to fighting.

*“Okay, in prison there are a lot of gangsters. There are a lot of fighting, you see.”*

(Participant 4)

*“Die laaities het ingekom, baklei en die kamers gebrand...”*

(Participant 6)

[“The boys came in, fighting and burnt the rooms...”]

(Participant 6)

One participant even expressed that if you do not want to adhere to cleaning the cell, your fellow inmates would stab or hit you with slots.

*“Ek het klom goed deurgegaan. Die mense steek mekaar en, en se jy willie skoonmaakie dan slaan hulle ‘n mens. Hulle steek vir jou of hulle slaan jou met slotte...”*

(Participant 9)

[“I went through a lot of stuff. The people stab each other and, and say you don’t wanna clean then they hit you. They stab you or they hit you with slots...”]

(Participant 9)

*“Want hier, die mense, hulle klap jou met die fys, tandepaste in jou gesig.”*

(Participant 5)

[“Because here, the people, they smack you with the fist, toothpaste in your face.”]

(Participant 5)

One participant expressed that prison is a bad place, where you could not live in peace.

*“My experiences in prison. Okay...,sometimes there’s like guys who’s always fighting, guys who’s like always in trouble, guys who’s rude to other people. Prison is not like a place where you can live like in peace. This place is bad, bad.”*

(Participant 11)

It is evident through these responses that the prison environment is quite a tough place to be and often the fighting among prisoners can become too much to handle, since these participants are still only children. The prison environment is one consumed by aggressive individuals, leading to violence. Another important discovery is that bullying occurs among the youth on a daily basis. However, it is surprising that within the South African literature on incarcerated youth, the term bullying is almost non-existent.

Bullying behaviour is referred to as peer victimisation involving physical, emotional and/or verbal abuse Hesselink-Louw (2005). International literature states that bullying constitutes an imbalance of power, a lack of concern on the part of the bully for the feelings of the victim as well as a lack of compassion. As highlighted within the findings of the present study, bullying includes the abuse of power through repeated aggressive behaviours towards the victim (Rapp-Paglicci, Roberts & Wodarski, 2002).

Prison gangs often exacerbate this problem, and the fact that it is often found that boys older than 17 years are detained with younger boys in the juvenile section, does not alleviate the problem. Africa Watch (1994) noted that the absence of segregation of youth by age, is particularly serious in the light of the disturbingly routine allegations of sexual abuse of juvenile prisoners, as well as other forms of violence. Clearly not enough has been done in the present to alleviate this problem within prison.

#### **4.2.1.3        *Gangsterism***

A major theme among all participants was that gangsterism was viewed as one of the main bad experiences they came across while in prison. Gangsterism is extremely rife within South African prisons and a major theme within the findings was that most participants had bad experiences at some time or other during their incarceration, which had some connection to gangs. The following participant mentioned that one of his bad experiences was joining a prison gang.

*“The bad experiences, like for instance me joining an organisation (gang)...But afterwards I saw the negative influence it had in my life.”*

(Participant 3)

Another participant even stated that he learnt a lot about gangsterism within prison. He was even approached and asked to join a gang, by many gangsters in prison.

*“In prison I’ve learnt a lot of stuff like...gangsterism and stuff like that, but many of them came to me and asked me if I don’t wanna be a gangster.”* (Participant 2)

These findings support the fact that gangsterism is prevalent in South African prisons and has been for decades (Dissel, 1996). In theory, gang membership is voluntary, but gangs are powerful and due to overcrowding conditions, violent coercive conformity could and usually is employed.

A further participant mentioned that gangs often rob and attack the smaller boys in prison. He refers to the older boys as groot mense (big adults), which is a horrific discovery, since all participants were detained within the juvenile section, a section developed to hold those between the ages of 14-17 years.

*“Gangs, hulle rand die klein laaities aan. Die groot mense kom hier dan steek hulle soma die chiefe.”* (Participant 9)

[“Gangs, they attack, rob the smaller boys. The big people come here and then they stab the warders.”] (Participant 9)

Most prisoners often feel that the prison authorities could not protect them against gang activities or violence (Dissel, 1996). Some forms of violence may include rape, assaults and bullying by other prisoners, usually gang members (De Ridder, 1996). Furthermore, the fact that youth older than 17 years of age are placed within the same cells as those younger than this remains a great problem, exacerbating violence within prison. This is a theme that emerges on numerous occasions within the findings of this study.

#### 4.2.1.4 *Loss of Family*

Another theme that emerged within this study, is the effects of the loss of family.

Many participants mentioned that they missed their family and that they wanted to go back home. Being away from their families was a great cause of much stress, experienced by the youth.

*“Klomp stress...dink aan my familie.”* (Participant 5)

The following participant expressed that he wanted to stop doing naughty things, since he longed to go home and be obedient towards his mother. His experiences had led him to the conclusion that he never wanted to end up in prison again.

*“Ek het nou gedink, ek issie meer lus om die stoute goed te doen nie. Ek wil hiustoe gaan. Laat ek vir een en vir altyd my ma gehoorsaam. Ek gattie weer hier belandie. Ek glo, ek, ek gattie weer hier kommie”* (Participant 6)

[“I thought now, I don’t feel like doing these naughty things anymore. I want to go home. That I can now and forever be obedient to my mother. I’m not going to end up here again. I believe, I, I’m not gonna come here again.”] (Participant 6)

In another case, a participant mentioned that when he told his family that he had joined a gang, they wanted nothing more to do with him.

*“Like for instance when I told my family, look here, uh...I’m part of a gang now. They told me, look here, the other thing is this, you not my son anymore and stuff like that.”*

(Participant 3)

The families of incarcerated youth often do not understand that the prison environment is an enclosed culture where a prisoner's world is very "small" and everything concerning his everyday functioning (reputation, status, power and privileges) matter (Hesselink-Louw, 2005). Possible antecedents that may trigger violent, aggressive behaviour within the individual include a lack of self-control, powerlessness, social isolation, frustration and involvement in gangs (Hesselink-Louw, 2005). This is a classic example of the vicious cycle within which many of the youth in prison are trapped. Their families usually lose faith and confidence in them during their incarceration, the period when they need their support the most.

Many participants come from poverty stricken communities, where families are either extremely dysfunctional, broken down or poor. Most, if not all incarcerated youth, often end up in prison, through criminal activities, to cope with the adverse conditions within which they have to live. One participant stated that he was always stealing in his community and this led him to lose his family, since they wanted nothing to do with him anymore.

*"Ek het gesteel baie en hulle't (his family)vir my gese hulle soek my nie by die huis nie...my ma hulle self, hulle soek my nie by die huis nie."* (Participant 8)

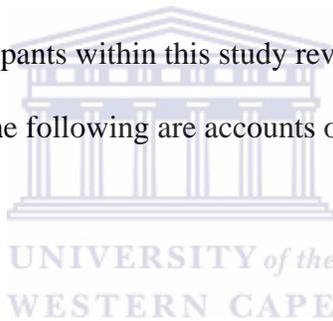
["I stole a lot and they told me they (his family) don't want me by the house...my mother herself, they don't want me by the house."] (Participant 8)

This finding is similar to many cases among the incarcerated population in this country. Educational and socio-economic discrimination has been linked to theft as a survival

strategy in certain sectors of the disadvantaged population (Africa Watch, 1994).

According to Muntingh (1998), this could lead one to postulate that most of the children currently in South African prisons are incarcerated as a result of poverty driven crime, exacerbated by the low socio-economic conditions found invariably within black communities.

In sum, the above findings support the notion that incarceration not only affects the youth in prison but the disruption, insulation or isolation of the family as a result of imprisonment holds severe consequences for their reintegration. Furthermore, this also undermines the informal mechanisms of social control in a community (Muntingh, 2005). Even though most of the participants within this study revealed that their time in prison consisted of bad experiences, the following are accounts of those who had good experiences.



#### **4.2.2            *Good Experiences by youth in Prison***

##### **4.2.2.1         *Involvement in Church Activities***

The only participants who expressed good experiences in prison, were those who were often involved in church activities or who were placed in the cell for ‘saved’ prisoners. However, roughly two participants had experienced this. Often those involved in Bible Studies within prison, would try to tell others about what they have learnt, with the attempt to change their lives for the better.

*“Ja (yes), my...you can say, I do bible study. Then I talk to some of the children. Then I talk to them here in the passage. If there’s someone here with me in the cell then I talk to them about the bible.”*

(Participant 10)

Church leaders within the prison were prominent figures and role models to those involved in church activities. One participant even left his gang after the Pastor spoke to him and told him that it was not worth it.

*“Uh, I was part of a gang, the 28. I was young that time. Pastor Mark, he liked me. You see, the boys who are 28 original, I was one of them. So Brother Mark, you know Brother Mark? Brother Mark told me, no that is wrong...so I leave the gang.”*

(Participant 11)

Involvement in church activities was viewed as an extremely positive agent within the lives of certain youth. Though there is not much literature to support the use of religious activities in prison, this was a surprising finding and should lead to further research in the area. What was even more surprising is that almost none of the participants spoke of their fellow inmates as friends, except for one, who clearly viewed it as one of the only positive experiences in prison.

The theme Good vs. Bad experiences of prison may be linked to Fanon’s theory of social oppression and violence. It is clear that all participants had bad experiences in prison. It is a pivotal point to remember that the present incarcerated youth population, stems from the previously oppressed generations of apartheid. Fanon’s theory was conceptualised during the colonial era, where he analysed the psycho-affective injuries of the oppressed

societies and the defensive mechanisms they adopted to survive (Bulhan, 1985). The youth of today were born into generations who were dehumanised under the oppressive white minority in South Africa. This led to an internalisation of a feeling of inferiority and less self-worth by many oppressed communities.

According to Dane (1994), oppression does not only occur among races but flourishes between people of different genders, ages, incomes, nationalities, religions, physical size, education, in sexual relations and institutions. Therefore, even though this country has ten years of democracy behind it, oppression is still alive and well within society.

Nowhere else is this statement more evident, than within the prison environment of South Africa. The incarcerated youth come from previously oppressed communities, where violence was used and internalised to overthrow the old apartheid regime. Today these communities are still psychologically, socially and economically affected by the past and have instilled the use of violence as the norm within their families and wider societies.

The prison population is stripped of all rights and live under unbearable conditions, similar to the oppressive times. Many have lost their selfhood through the harsh conditions of prison and have adopted aggressive and violent behaviours as a coping mechanism. Fanon declares that the pervasive violence of the past colonial structure has so destroyed individual and cultural integrity, that it can only be retrieved by violent confrontation (Dane, 1994). The participants mentioned their bad experiences of sodomy, fighting, gangsterism and the loss of family, which can all be explained by these theories. One could say that the prison youth of today are living within an oppressive institution, similar to many under the apartheid era. In order to cope and retrieve their

individual integrity, they have adopted these violent tendencies, which trickle down to the families and communities they eventually return to.

### 4.3 Perpetrators of Aggression

It was found that all of the participants were perpetrators of aggression towards another person in prison at some point of their incarceration. The most evident act was stabbing another prisoner, usually over resources or new prisoners who were seen as potential members to build a particular gang bigger and thus stronger.

*“I stabbed the person, because why...you see in the prison is...there’s gangs here, three gangs, 26, 27, 28, now I belong to the 26 organisation. We fight over new people that comes ‘cause we build our. How can I say, we build our gang stronger with him.”*

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(Participant 1)

One participant mentioned that he was provoked and assaulted by another prisoner, therefore, he stabbed the boy.

*“I stabbed the boy...because that boy, I was sleeping there in that room. That boy blamed me for his uh, tobacco and cigarettes...he hitted, so I fight back, but that was in the night.”*

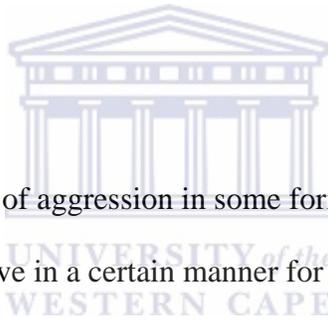
(Participant 10)

*“...he want to stab me, then I catch him there then I stabbed him...then I pushed him then.”*

(Participant 11)

The above two cases clearly show that the participants' aggressive behaviours are often reactions to other prisoners' violent behaviours or threats towards them. Thus, the prison environment often leads many youth to become perpetrators of aggression. McLachlan (1984) cited in De Ridder (1996), states that due to the very nature of prisons, overcrowding, isolation from family, boredom and powerlessness, there is intense competition and rivalry within gangs themselves, as members fight for resources such as, new recruits, tobacco, dagga or sex. Though most of the participants within this study were perpetrators of aggression, many were also victims of aggression. This will be highlighted next.

#### 4.4 Victims of Aggression



Most of the youth were victims of aggression in some form or other, in prison. In most cases the aggressor would behave in a certain manner for resources such as, cigarettes, shoes, clothes etc. Most of the time the aggressor would threaten to stab the victim, in order to control the situation. The following example is an extract of a situation such as this.

*“That guy he came to me, he say I must give him all this stuff. I, I say to him, no I can’t give him. Then he come to me and he took my things. Then I catch him, then he want to stab me...”*

(Participant 11)

These findings may also be linked to the statement proposed by Muntingh (2005), that the effects of imprisonment can be physically, mentally and emotionally devastating for any individual. A prisoners experience is from the outset an experience of being

violently dominated and is coloured from the beginning by the fear of being violently treated (Redding, 2000).

Some participants mentioned the fact that warders often hit them, in order to discipline them. However, the following statement made by one of the participant's was quite shocking, since all youth in a cell would be physically punished if one offender was accused of a misdeed.

*“Like when, anytime then they (warders) hit you with broomsticks...cause they want to find out where's the knife because nobody's gonna tell them where's the knife 'cause they scared.”*

(Participant 10)

Another participant mentioned stabbing a warder, after he was smacked. Physical punishment by warders were very common within prison, in order to discipline the youth.

*“Ek het die chieff gesteek...hy't my geklap in my gesig.”*

(Participant 9)

[“I stabbed the warder...he smacked me in my face.”]

(Participant 9)

The use of physical punishment was a shocking discovery about the staff of Pollsmoor Prison. Even though staff were not permitted to use physical punishment to discipline the incarcerated youth, it was often applied within this prison. There is a paucity of literature on the use of physical punishment by prison staff within South African prisons, but may be an important issue to focus on in the very near future.

The two themes, perpetrators and victims of aggression may be linked to Fanon's (1968) theory of violence. As mentioned earlier, the incarcerated youth are products of oppressive generations and have been socialised into adopting aggressive and violent behaviours as coping mechanisms within their poverty stricken communities. Even after apartheid, present generations are struggling to cope with democracy, when socio-economic inequality is still prevalent within our society. Fanon (1968) states that violence among the colonised is a postponement of the decision to raise arms against the oppressor and it is this wilful avoidance that motivates the enactment of violence against those with whom one most closely identifies, since the last resort for the black is to defend his personality vis-à-vis his brother (Murphy, 2003).

Thus, within the prison setting the coloniser could be viewed as the prison authorities, since the youth live in conditions without even the basic human rights. It is the frustration and hostile environment of prison that influences these youth to defend their personalities by fighting each other, as they do not have the power to fight the authorities. This often causes high levels of violence among youth in prison, including stabbing each other for basic resources such as food, clothes and beds.

Another aspect within the themes that can be linked to Fanon's theory (1968), is the fact that prison staff often use physical punishment to discipline the youth. Fanon expressed the belief that vertical violence from the oppressor, (in this case the prison staff) to the oppressed (prison youth) leads to horizontal violence among the oppressed (prison youth) (Bulhan, 1985). Thus, the use of physical punishment by prison staff could have detrimental effects on the high level of violence already found among this incarcerated population.

## 4.5 Dealing with aggressive people towards you before and within Prison

### 4.5.1 Before Prison

More than half of the participants dealt with aggression towards them by simply ignoring those responsible or by walking away, before being sent to prison. It was evident that even though many of these youth come from violent communities, they often had the ability to just ignore aggressive people. The following three participants describe their reactions to aggressive people towards them, before they came to prison.

*“Ja ek hettie nog geworry oor hulle nie.”* (Participant 8)

[“Yes I didn’t still worry about them.”] (participant 8)

*“Daar buitekant het ek nie baklei nie.”* (Participant 5)

[“There outside I didn’t fight.”] (Participant 5)

*“Ek het hulle ignore...as die laities praat met my dan ignore ek hulle, ek doen niks.”*

(Participant 6)

[“I ignored them...if the boys talk with me I ignore them, I do nothing.”]

(Participant 6)

However, one participant clearly mentioned that even though he would first talk to the person to sort the matter out, he would not hesitate to use his fist, if necessary.

*“I would first talk to him and try to sort it out...but if talking wouldn’t help I would use my fist.”* (Participant 3)

One participant expressed how his mother used to buy him everything he wanted outside, but that his friends within his community, negatively influenced him to do drugs and that they even made him end up in prison.

*“I was going to church outside. My mother also tell me I must go with her to church. My mother buy me everything, good things, everything, but hey my friends also tell me I must smoke ganja, do drugs, you see. So now I say my friends I must never listen to...my friends even make come here.”* (Participant 11)

Even though the ability to simply ignore aggressive people towards them may seem like an admirable act from certain participants, it may portray that these youth have come to normalise these types of behaviours from individuals within their community. The disintegration of families and communities via forced removals, the migrant labour system and the concentration of the black and coloured population into overcrowded areas during the Apartheid era, has generated extensive social problems within present society (De Ridder, 1996). The present generation was born from generations, psychologically and economically affected by this country’s socio-political past. Crime and poverty have become the norm within many of these communities, leading to the socialisation of our youth within a dysfunctional society.

#### 4.5.2 *Within Prison*

The participants were asked how they dealt with aggressive people towards them, now within prison and the general notion was that it was much more difficult to ignore these prisoners, perhaps due to the close proximity within which they are placed.

*“I just ignore them. If it comes, I must ma fight ‘cause I can’t just do nothing”*

(Participant 7)

*“It’s more difficult...now you tell him you don’t have, now he wanna get cross. Then automaties (automatically) tomorrow, then you again fight over your stuff. There outside they don’t still, they won’t still do what they want to do because...no one wants to be in so a place...if they already in so a place (prison), then he want to do what he want to do.”*

(Participant 7)

Another participant stated that he had to wear a mask in prison, he had to be a different person, he had to be aggressive to cope with aggressive people towards him in prison.

*“...because here I have to wore a, a mask, like you say...I’m aggressive, I don’t argue with that...sometimes I’m very aggressive.”*

(Participant 3)

These extracts from participants within this study relates to findings within a study that interviewed violent juvenile offenders about how they cope with prison life, Eisikovits and Baizerman (1983) cited in Redding (2000), reported that daily survival required finding ways to fit into the inmate culture, that juveniles experienced difficulty with

authoritarian relationships with adult inmates and that adjusting to prison meant accepting violence as a part of daily life and becoming even more violent youth (Redding, 2000).

Often the participants would tell the warder about the act and request to be placed within a single cell, where they would feel safer. The single cell was often viewed as a safe haven for most youth. It was a form of escaping from harm and danger within prison, as stated by the following participants.

*“Most, most of the people in prison that, that are soft, they don’t wanna be part of a gang and stuff like that. They, they go to the...they go to the, to the warder to send them to the single cells...that’s the only way that, that they will survive.”* (Participant 2)

*“Maybe them...they sleep for one night in the room. The next morning they tell the chief. ‘Chief I don’t wanna sleep here anymore because it’s too ruff and stuff, take me to the single cells’. Now they take them to the single cells, it’s like that.”*

(Participant 1)

A particular participant even stated that he started becoming more calm and does not fight so much anymore since he was placed within a single cell. Furthermore, he felt that no one could bother or provoke him, now that he was sleeping in a single cell.

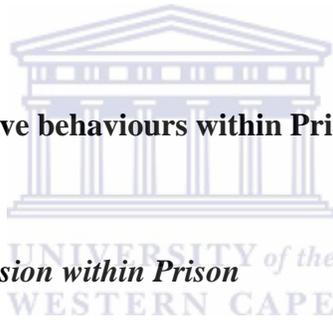
*“Want ek sien ek baklei nie meer so baie in die gevangenis nie. Ek is ‘n bietjie rustig nou. Omdat ek in ‘n single cell slap, nou pla hulle (fellow prisoners) nie vir my nie.”*

(Participant 9)

[“Because I see I don’t fight as much in prison anymore. I am a little calm now. Because I sleep in a single cell, now they (fellow prisoners) don’t bother me.”]

(Participant 9)

There is no literature supporting the effects of holding youth within single cells within prison. However, the participants within this study revealed that single cells often acted as a safe haven for youth who were being bullied or victimised. Moreover, it was found that usually aggressive youth became less aggressive once placed within a single cell. This proposes that aggression by youth is often provoked by other aggressive youth within prison.



#### **4.6 Differences in aggressive behaviours within Prison**

##### ***4.6.1 Development of Aggression within Prison***

Participants were asked if they have changed in any way since they have been in prison, compared to how they were before being incarcerated. Most of the participants felt that they have changed for the worse and that they were much more aggressive now than before coming to prison. Aggression was often viewed as a coping mechanism and a way of protecting yourself in prison.

*“Ja (yes), this place is the survival of the fittest. See, if you gonna let this person use you to do anything man, then you gonna make yourself a target ‘cause everybody’s gonna do it...defend yourself, by being aggressive...it’s very important.”* (Participant 1)

It is also mentioned that within prison one cannot be small (non-aggressive, submissive), you have to be aggressive to show others that you will not be taken advantage of.

*“Like for instance here, I have to wear a mask because you can’t be like...small. If you was like small, they gonna take advantage of you, and I can’t let that happen, because I don’t want somebody else to take advantage of me in here.”* (Participant 3)

These examples show that incarcerated youth are involved in a number of interactions among themselves on a daily basis. Interactions are defined as interdependent behaviours in which, the behaviour of one person serves, in turn, as a stimulus for and a response to, the behaviour of others (Cohen et al, 2005). Thus, this proposes that the aggressive reactions from youth are often a response to other aggressive individuals. These findings may also be linked to a study, where juveniles in prison reported that much of their time was spent learning criminal behaviour from other inmates and that there was pressure to prove their toughness through aggression (Redding, 2000).

The following participant’s statement, is a portrayal of the lack of protection incarcerated youth in prison have from prison authorities and which is highly needed.

*“Ek is different...my style is different...dis ‘n harde plek man, jy moet jou eie man staan, se ma nou daar’s iemand wat jou gaan slat dans daar niemand om hom te keer nie, jy moet jou eie man staan.”* (Participant 5)

[“I am different...my style is different...this is a hard place man, you must stand your own man, say there’s someone that is gonna hit you then there’s nobody to stop him, you must stand your own man.”] (Participant 5)

Due to the lack of protection from prison authorities, the incarcerated youth often have to protect and defend themselves by adopting aggressive behaviours, to cope with the dangers of prison life. Within literature on youth in prison, most prisoners often feel that the prison authorities could not protect them against gang activities or violence (Dissel, 1996). Therefore, this has become a serious problem to be considered by the prison authorities.

#### ***4.6.2 Development of Anger within Prison***

Another finding was that certain youth have anger within them, due to various reasons, which often leads them to act out aggressively towards other youth in prison.

*“Ja (yes)...you come here, you get more aggressive, you see. If I see a guy, I beat him up because I’ve got that anger, you see.”* (Participant 12)

*“I have more anger towards society...and...I deal with my anger...outside I wasn’t angry with a lot of people...here in prison when I sit on my bed ...somebody, he just say, look here, give me this...I tell him, look here ou bra (old brother), no man. It’s almost like something that’s getting up to my throat. I just wanna slap this guy, such things.”*

(Participant 3)

These statements support the literature on the development of anger among incarcerated youth, which may ultimately lead to aggression. It has been proposed that aggression is often a consequence of anger arousal and many studies indicate anger as a significant

predictor of aggression (Wood & Newton, 2003). Anger can be defined as a response to an aversive state consisting of both cognitive and physiological components. It is a normal and often functional response to negative situations, protecting self-esteem, instigating action, energising and defending individuals against psychological and physical harm (Wood & Newton, 2003).

This is extremely relevant within the prison setting, where youth often have to defend themselves against both extreme physical and psychological harm. Anger may result from circumstances, where people feel that they have been unjustly provoked or violated, making it likely that angry individuals may believe that someone else is responsible for a negative event, which may cause aggression, fights and violence within prison.

The adoption and application of aggression among prison youth may be explained by Fanon's theory (1968) of structural, institutional and personal violence. Structural violence is a feature of social structures, which is inherent in the established modes of social relations, distribution of goods and services and legal practices of dispensing justice (Bulhan, 1985). Individuals are socialised into it as victims or perpetrators and in the absence of fundamental change, they play out their ascribed roles (Bulhan, 1985).

The fact that most, if not all prison youth, come from previously oppressed generations, they have been socialised into adapting to violent poverty stricken communities. This often leads to incarceration where they experience institutional violence.

This has been proven by the findings, where basic rights such as protection from prison authorities, education, food, recreation, and good living conditions are not practiced. Therefore, these adverse conditions may lead to the construction of personal violence

among these youth. Personal violence is a phenomenon of dyad, where one can identify a specific perpetrator whose aims can be verified and a victim whose injuries can be assessed (Bulhan, 1985). The prison environment is filled with perpetrators of aggression and violence, which is often a function of both structural and institutional violence. Therefore, these aspects should be highly considered by professionals when dealing with prison youth.

## **4.7 Gang Membership in Prison**

### ***4.7.1 Gang Membership for Protection***

The participants were asked if they were part of a gang in prison and more than half stated that they in fact were members of a gang. Certain participants felt strongly about their gang membership and believed that it was a form of survival, protection and a good tool to defend oneself.

*“Joined, to defend myself...to survive ja, it’s important.”* (Participant 1)

*“I’m part of an organisation (gang), because of survival...I can walk freely, everywhere I want to, nobody can do me any harm, if I was nothing (a non-gangster), they would rob me. Now I walk freely with my own stuff, nobody can do mw anything...they can’t rob me, they can’t stab me.”* (Participant 3)

*“Ja...om myself te versterk.”* (Participant 5)

[“Yes...to strengthen myself.”] (Participant 5)

*“Ja (yes)...to protect myself.”*

(Participant 12)

Groups, such as prison gangs, comprise multiple interacting individuals and multiple relationships and involve processes such as cohesion and the construction of social hierarchies (Cohen et al, 2005). A child’s aggressor-victim relationship is influenced by the range and nature of social interactions experienced by each member of the dyad, as well as being influenced by the nature of the peer group, in which it is embedded (Cohen et al, 2005).

Within the prison environment gangsters are often viewed as being at the very top of this social hierarchy, with non-gangsters viewed at the very bottom. Each of these levels of social complexity is influenced by the physical environment and by socio-cultural values, beliefs and institutions (Cohen et al, 2005). Therefore, it is safe to state that incarcerated youth consists of individuals with unique characteristics, embedded within levels of social complexity, such as the physical environment, namely prison.

#### ***4.7.2 Gang Membership through Coercion***

One participant expressed that he was forced to join a gang and wear their tattoo. However, he states that even though as a gangster, there are a lot of things possible for, such as easy access to resources (cigarettes, money etc), gangsterism was not worth it because you could get hurt or even be killed.

*“Hulle’t my geforce om die chappie (gang tattoo) te dra...as jy ‘n gangster is kan jy klomp goete...daar’s klomp goete possible vir jou...’n mens hoefie om hard te lewe in die tronk nie. Dit issie ‘n benefittie...want jy kan seer kry as jy aan ‘n gang behoord...hulle kan hou dood maak.”*

(Participant 5)

[“They forced me to wear this tattoo...if you are a gangster there’s a lot of things...there’s lots of things possible for you...a person does not have to live hard in the prison. It isn’t a benefit...because you can get hurt if you belong to a gang...they can kill you.”]

(Participant 5)

Other youth may even be intimidated to join a gang, as mentioned by the following participant.

*“Because some people (some gangsters) intimidate them (non-gangsters) and stuff like, they tell him, naai (no), he musn’t go with that guy because he’s a Frans (non-gangster) and stuff like that. You must come join us (the gang). Then they press lot of stuff in his head...”*

(Participant 2)

These participants clearly state the use of coercion and intimidation by prison gangs to recruit new members. In theory, gang membership is voluntary, but gangs are powerful and due to overcrowding conditions, violent coercive conformity could and usually is employed (Dissel, 1996).

### 4.7.3 *Gang Membership through the Community*

A further statement made by a participant, reveals that gangsterism has become a way of life and a normal phenomenon, since some of the participants belong to gangs both outside and inside prison.

*“Omdat my broer was ‘n gangster, so het ek tussen die gangsters opgegroeï.”*

[“Because my brother was a gangster, so I grew up among the gangsters.”]

(Participant 9)

*“...I shot somebody man and went to prison...I belonged to a gang outside also.”*

(Participant 1)

“I, I didn’t choose to belong to a gang, because that time (before prison) we all used to be together since we were young, you see...go to the parties, go to the club, do drugs, anything.”

(Participant 12)

Educational and socio-economic discrimination has been linked to theft as a survival strategy in certain sectors of the disadvantaged population (Africa Watch, 1994). This could lead one to postulate that most of the children currently in South African prisons are incarcerated as a result of poverty driven crime, exacerbated by the low socio-economic conditions found invariably within black communities (Muntingh, 1998). Through these findings it is also evident that gangs are rife within these communities as a strategy for youth to cope with their adverse environments. This makes them even more susceptible to prison gang membership when they are incarcerated.

#### 4.7.4 *Gang Membership perceived as a benefit*

A prominent sub-theme that emerged from the findings was that some participants felt that life in prison was much easier if you were a gangster and that resources were much more accessible to you.

*“Is...in prison it’s not uh, easy to, to get stuff and things like that. If you want something, you must first give something then you can get. You must give to get...because in prison if you a gangster you, you can get stuff easy, but for most of the people it...it’s hard to get stuff...”*

(Participant 2)

*“Because like I said before, you can be anybody’s punching bag. They can molest you, sexually because you can’t do anything.”*

(Participant 3)

*“...if I’m not a gangster then the gangsters can take his clothes off and then he say I must wash it there. I’m gonna wash it because I’m not a gangster, you see. If I don’t want they gonna abuse me.”*

(Participant 4)

*“Niemand kan vir jou se as jy ‘n gangster issie.”*

(Participant 5)

[“Nobody can tell you, if you are a gangster.”]

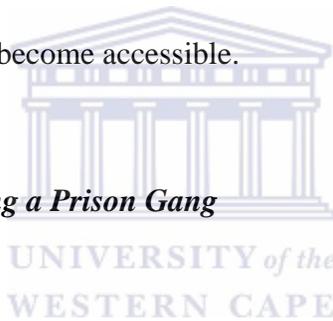
(Participant 5)

These findings may be linked to research suggesting that gangs become new homes for prisoners who often become victims of gang violence, while already experiencing the stress associated with incarceration, such as being away from ones family (Alexander, 2000). These finding may further be linked to a case study formulated by Hesselink-

Louw (2005), where a shy first time prisoner was raped by members of the 26 gang, leaving him with feelings of revenge. He ultimately joined the 28 gang to alleviate his feelings of hatred, isolation, for protection against the 26 gang, attention, acceptance, support and other luxuries (Hesselink-Louw, 2005).

It has also been found that gang membership has become an important aspect of his life, where his position as a 'general' which is known to be a high rank within the gang hierarchy, allows him to make important decisions concerning gang activity, as well as giving him respect, power and status within prison (Hesselink-Louw, 2005). Therefore, many youth within prison feel that it is a benefit to be a gangster, since you have protection and many resources become accessible.

#### **4.7.5 Consequences of leaving a Prison Gang**



In some cases young boys become part of gangs and when they become involved in church activities, they decide to leave the gang. However, this has many negative consequences for the youth, where the gang members may beat him continuously throughout his sentence, as he is seen as a traitor.

*“Uh I was part of a gang, the 28...so I leave the gang...they don’t want me, they don’t even want to talk with me, you see. When the other one, he like, he shout me, he want to beat me, since, since I’m not part of them.”* (Participant 11)

*“My plan was to join a gang...but I changed that, I told myself no I won’t. Now they (the gang) treat me different, if I eat then they want to take my food or if I walk in the passage*

*then they knock me. I...I got, once they hit me...I stood by the tap so one boy he just came and hit me, so I thought, no that's part of them (the gang)."*

(Participant 10)

Leaving a gang is often like signing a death warrant, since they are driven by the fear that a departing member may defect to a rival gang, thus they would rather kill him (Nott, Rosemary & Theron, 1990). Considering these statements, it seems clear that these participants pose a threat to the survival and secrecy of the gang as a whole. Thus, they are constantly assaulted and beaten by the gang members.

#### **4.8 Perceptions on Gang Formation in Prison**

All participants had a similar and clear understanding of why gangs are formed within prison. Most mentioned that gangs are a form of protection and defending oneself, since you would have a whole gang of prisoners looking out for you. This is a result of the three different gangs in prison, the 26's, 27's and 28's, who stand together respectively.

*"...if you are a gangster in prison no one can come to you and wanting to rob you and something like that. No one can take your money or your clothes. No one can get to you because everybody's afraid."*

(Participant 4)

*"We almost like a big family...because if they stab me, my brothers (fellow gang members) will stab them, and me also participating by stabbing them."*

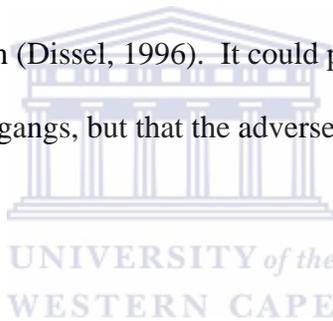
(Participant 3)

*“Miskien om hulle self, om hulle self te verdedig.”* (Participant 5)

[“Maybe to, to defend themselves.”] (Participant 5)

*“Gangs are formed to, to stay the...to stay out of danger...and, and because when they come outside then they mos’n dik ding (big shots!).”* (Participant 10)

Once again it is evident that gangs are formed in prison for protection. Gang membership is believed by many youth, to strengthen you, due to the fact that your fellow gang members are there to keep you safe from danger or even to help you out when the need arises. This relates to the proposition that many young prisoners are forced to join gangs as a form of protection in prison (Dissel, 1996). It could probably be that certain, if not most youth do not want to join gangs, but that the adverse prison environment forces them to do it.



#### **4.9 Perceptions on the Role of Gangs in Prison**

It was evident through the findings that the role of gangs is one of extreme crime and violence within prison. The majority of participants stated that the role of the gangs were mainly to rob other prisoners of their belongings such as shoes, clothes, blankets etc. This often leads to many fights and gangs usually retaliate by stabbing or beating the victim.

*“Gangs aren’t important, but they think they are important, because...they get money, they get clothes, you see...they took it from the other boys, you see...they beat the other boys, you see and they rob them.”* (Participant 4)

One participant mentioned that the prison gangs have the same roles as the military or even the warders in prison itself. A young gang member would have to work himself up these ranks by doing various criminal activities within prison, such as stabbing, robbing, sodomising or beating fellow offenders.

*“They have different roles, like all the guards here you see here in prison, they have all their roles...the military, we have generals...sergeants...everything we have...you work you up.”*

(Participant 1)

These extracts can be linked to the numerous literature, which states that, prison gangs generally have a coherent national organisation and militaristic structure that mimic the old South African Apartheid system in general and the prison administration in particular (De Ridder, 1996). Similar to prison warders, the prison gangsters adopted their roles as a way of coping with the harsh realities of prison life during these years. However, these gangs have stood the test of time and are still practiced today, with almost the exact rituals and structure many years ago.

It was also mentioned that the gangsters use their numbers and tattoo's as a weapon to intimidate, rob and hurt other prisoners in various forms. The gangsters' tattoo's act as proof and representation of what they signify, which is power, violence and control over other prisoners.

*“Hier, soos ek nou kan sien is dit die nommers wat hulle het, 26, 27, 28, daai nommers.”*

(Participant 8)

[“Here, like I can see, it’s the numbers that they have, 26, 27, 28, that numbers.”]

(Participant 8)

*“...they say, ja (yes) I’m a number, no one can tell me. I can do this. I can do that. They rob people and stuff like that.”*

(Participant 2)

*“Die klomp chappies wat hulle op chap, hulle, hulle hou vir hulle groot...hulle maak ander mense se kinders seer...hulle stiek die mense soma met die meste, die meste in die selle, vir geld en drugs en, en...ek voel hartseer vir die mense, hulle sterwe ook hier.”*

(Participant 6)

[“The lot of tattoos that they tattoo on, they, they keep them big...they hurt other people’s children...they stab the people with knives, the knives in the cells, for money and drugs and, and...I feel sad for these people, they also die here.”]

(Participant 6)

According to Nott et al., (1990), depending on the gang, they can be identified by their manner of dress, their language and more importantly, their gang tattoo. On joining a gang, each member receives a ‘chappie’ or tattoo showing to which he belongs (Nott et al., 1990). Within prison these tattoos will consist of either the number 26, 27 or 28, the three number gangs. Often these tattoos will be proof and representation of gang membership and thus it is used by many as a weapon to scare others into submission.

#### 4.10 Perceptions on why Youth join Gangs in Prison

All participants felt that youth join gangs for protection, power and respect within prison.

Many youth even join gangs due to peer pressure, since their friends are gangsters.

*“Peer pressure...because most of their friends or a few of their friends are, are here...and they tell them, look here, come stay with me here in my room man...it’s almost like a first stage, second stage, stages that take place because I’m gonna tell him, here’s nothing in prison man, everybody can do what they like...if they want to stab they can stab, if they want to beat you, they beat you...come with me, join my gang...they can do nothing. You are, are gonna be like brothers, nobody can do us nothing, we gonna stand like one.”*

(Participant 3)

*“Because he want...everyone in prison to respect him, so, so they give him a number...28 or 26.”*

(Participant 4)

*“Cause they think that they can help themselves out, next time if they come again in so a place then no one can tell them...”*

(Participant 7)

It was stated that youth often join gangs as a form of protection so that they could depend on their gang to ‘help them out’ when they were in some sort of danger.

*“Ja, soos, as hulle baklei in die tronk dan kan die mense wat hulle nou by gangs geraak het, vir hulle nou help.”*

(Participant 8)

[Yes, like, when they fight in the prison then the people by which they became gangsters from, can help them now.”] (Participant 8)

*“Because they want to, to be strong and also they want to be safe for, for their safety.”*  
(Participant 12)

Another prominent sub-theme throughout the findings was participants perceptions that life is easier for you in prison, if you are a gangster.

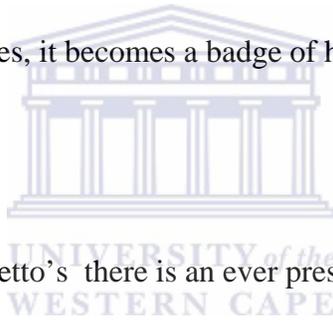
*“You will stay, like, uh...yor, you stay...yor! You won’t be happy man, because if you not a gangster you nothing, you see, you nothing. I can say go and fetch me water, you must fetch me water. Wash my clothes, you must wash my clothes, you see. Wash my dishes, you must wash dishes. Everything you must do if you, you a Frans (a non-gangster). Everything you must do, you se.”*  
(Participant 12)

*“Because they want to stay nice. When you original (a gangster) you stay nice here...because you treat bad other boys, you see. You treat them bad. You tell them wash my clothing, wash my underpants, you see. Wash the toilet, clean there. He’s just accepting everything.”*  
(Participant 11)

The following participant mentions the state of overcrowding and that this makes it extremely difficult to live in peace in prison.

*“In the room where you sleep, there’s about 80 people...you are nothing in prison. If you come past this guy, he slaps you, you can’t do anything to him...because he’s a gangster, you’re, you’re nothing.”* (Participant 3)

It is quite evident from these findings that youth often join prison gangs for protection, respect and power. Due to circumstances within the poverty stricken areas, in which most of the incarcerated youth come from, rituals have been submerged in the struggle for survival and youth devise their own rites of passage to adulthood. Thus, gangs are a contradictory and imagined community created to distance youth from the influence of parents or to make up for their absence, a bond of friendship, fear, protection or enmity, experienced in their communities, it becomes a badge of honour and a mark of the beast (Pinnock, 1996).



On the volatile streets of the ghetto’s there is an ever present danger that aggressions usually held in check by social pressures, may break free and the search for respect in the crossing to adulthood takes on larger-than-life proportions (Pinnock, 1996). Though different, the prison environment is quite similar to the communities within which these youth lived. Some of them have not reached adulthood yet, and are in search of a rite of passage, to cope with the adverse conditions of incarceration. Prison gangs become the weapon they use to cope with these issues.

Therefore, it can be postulated that prison gangs often become a rite of passage through the hallways and rooms of the enemy (adverse conditions) into the bosom of the admiring gang (Pinnock, 1996). In the desperation of the deteriorated communities as well as prison, peer admiration has a high value and the trickle-down from successful crime

syndicates keeps the door from the wolf of poverty (Pinnock, 1996). These explanations give a clear picture of why prison gangs have remained dominant within prisons throughout the country for many years. These gangs have worked for incarcerated youth and adults alike across generations, and show no sign of deteriorating in the near future.

#### **4.11 Perceptions on Prison Violence**

Prison is a violent and hostile environment and as mentioned earlier, all participants had experienced some form of violence during incarceration. The following section depicts the main causes of prison violence as experienced by the participants themselves. The following themes emerged from the findings.

##### **4.11.1 Main causes of Prison Violence**



###### **4.11.1.1 Gangsterism**

All participants felt that gangsterism is the main cause of the high level of violence within prison.

*“Gangs are the main cause of prison violence.”* (Participant 1)

*“When they (gangs) get arguments and stuff like that...maybe about, maybe the 26 is bothering the 28, now they argue, after that they just stab each other, they just hit...they just hit each other...if here in prison wasn't gangsters the prison would, the prison*

*wouldn't be like this...people stabbing each other and stuff like that...drugs, smuggling, dagga smuggling..."* (Participant 2)

*"...there isn't mos one organisation (gang), there's three. So if two of them don't understand each other correctly, they going to argue, there's going to be a stabbing. The other one will also interfere...if one room fights here, the other room is also going to fight, because they family."* (Participant 3)

*"Because others...they are not free here in prison, you see because of the gangsters...they cannot do what they want to do, you see, the gangsters, they control them, you see. Like if they say you must fight with the other boy, you must fight with that boy."* (Participant 4)

Many participants stated that gangsterism was one of the main causes of prison violence. It was also felt that gangs seem to have the most control over the prisoners within prison. They are often viewed as having the most power because they are so widely feared. The participants' perceptions could be linked to the fact that prison gangs consists of three groups, the 26's, 27's and 28's, each with their self-made philosophies of banditry and their collectively assigned roles (Steinberg, 2004a).

The 26's are to accumulate wealth acquired through cunning and trickery, which is to be distributed between the three gangs. The 28's are to fight on behalf of all three gangs for better conditions for inmates and they are also permitted to have sex, in their own ritualised manner among themselves (Steinberg, 2004a). The 27's are the guarantor of gang law and aim to keep the peace between the three gangs. They would right wrongs

by wreaking revenge; when blood is spilled, they would spill blood in turn (Steinberg, 2004a). Their roles are often crime-driven and brutal, making it is easy to understand how these gangs can remain so powerful in prison. Basically, these gangs have made their own rules in prison, which not only the gang members themselves should follow but the whole incarcerated population. This has created high levels of violence within this setting and has detrimental implications throughout the wider society.

#### **4.11.1.2 Resources**

Another important factor perpetuating violence among prisoners, is the daily stealing and fighting over resources such as food, clothes, shoes, blankets and cigarettes.

*“Daar’s bakleiery oor skoene, oor enige iets...se nou daai man wil ‘n ding he en jy wil dittie gee nie dan, dan se hy vir ‘n ander man in daai kamer, hy moet dit steel vanaand. Nou more oggend dan soek daai man sy skoene dan wil hy iemand stiek vir sy skoene.”*

(Participant 5)

[“There’s fighting over shoes, over anything...say now that man want something and you don’t wanna give it, then he tells another man in that room, he must steal it tonight. Now tomorrow morning then that man look for his shoes then he want to stab somebody for his shoes.”]

(Participant 5)

*“Anything that is so small they fight over...over a cigarette they fight, mostly cigarettes.”*

(Participant 7)

*“Hulle baklei oor rook goed, hulle baklei oor jou klere wat ek nou wil he. Hulle baklei oor skoene...hulle baklei oor slap bedde en goetes, matraste en al die goete baklei hulle oor.”*

(Participant 8)

[“They fight over smoke stuff, they fight over your clothes that I want now. They fight over shoes...they fight over sleeping beds and things, mattresses and all these things they fight over.”]

(Participant 8)

It has already been mentioned that most of the incarcerated population within Pollsmoor Prison stem from poverty stricken communities, within the Cape Flats. It has also been shown that most of the youth in prison, end up there as a result of poverty-driven crime (Muntingh, 1998). Due to the poor conditions and overcrowding within this prison, basic resources, such as food, beds and blankets, become a luxury to most who are trapped there. The lack of family support, which is often due to the fact that families cannot afford travel costs to prison, contributes to the fighting over these resources, for survival.

#### **4.11.1.3      *Drugs***

Drugs was also mentioned by some participants, as being a motivator for prison violence and is often at the core of many arguments and fights among prisoners.

*“Drugs...cause arguments.”*

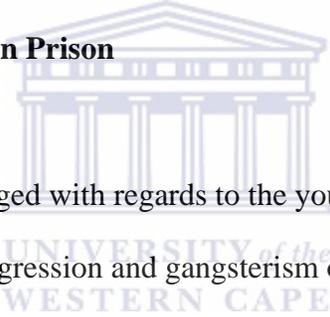
(Participant 3)

*“I think it’s drugs...someone who didn’t fight outside, when you come in prison, you gonna fight in, in here.”*

(Participant 4)

These findings can be linked to the literature which states that there is a very strong association between drugs and crime (Muntingh, 2005). Drugs has become an increasing problem within many communities within the Cape Flats. Usually youth are already addicted to drugs when they are incarcerated. Furthermore, though drugs is not permitted within prison, authorities have a major problem with ameliorating the smuggling of drugs within these confined walls. Drugs are also typically associated with the younger age groupings and youth culture, however, there is not sufficient research findings on the drug-criminal behaviour link in South Africa (Muntingh, 2005).

#### **4.12 Perceptions on Power in Prison**



The two main themes that emerged with regards to the youths' perceptions of power within prison, was the use of aggression and gangsterism or gang involvement. These were viewed as the main tools for attaining and maintaining power among fellow prisoners or even authorities within prison. The following section will outline these two themes, by giving actual accounts of participants' perceptions of aggression and gangsterism, linked to power, respectively.

##### ***4.12.1 Aggression linked to Power***

Aggression was viewed by most participants as being an important contributor in developing and maintaining power within prison. Aggression was also viewed as a coping mechanism within the harsh environment of prison. The following participant

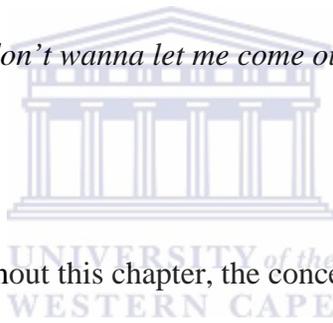
describes how he applies aggression within his environment, as a way of coping and attaining power.

*“Defend yourself...by being aggressive, anything...because that’s a defence mechanism man, it defends you ... by showing them I’ll stab someone in front of the police. Then the police will hit me to a pulp and I’ll just lay there maybe. Ok, they will look after me...we have a...a hospital also. ”*

(Participant 1)

*“Like a...like all this wardens, they know me already man. They know what am I capable of doing and how aggressive I can be and stuff like that. First, if they used to lock me up, then they lock me up and they don’t wanna let me come out. Then I will hit someone’s head open...so man.”*

(Participant 1)



On numerous occasions throughout this chapter, the concept of aggression has been overlapping across many themes. The theme aggression linked to power, supports the literature within this study, proposing that possible antecedents that may trigger violent, aggressive behaviour within the incarcerated individual, include a lack of self-control, powerlessness, social isolation, frustration and involvement in gangs (Hesselink-Louw, 2005). A study conducted by Redding (2000) states that in order for youth to cope with prison life, daily survival required finding ways to fit into the prison culture by accepting violence as a part of life and becoming violent youth themselves.

#### 4.12.2 Gangsterism linked to Power

It was often mentioned that gangs within prison were feared for their large numbers, and if a prisoner were to attack a gangster then his whole gang would defend him.

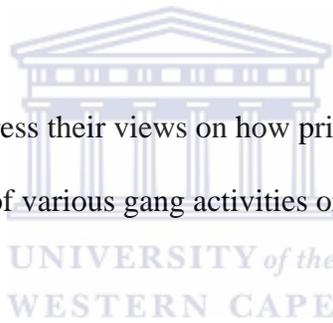
*“Se nou ek en my vriend wil nou vir die persoon slat en dan gaan haal die een nou sy homesa (fellow gang members) en al die goete, dan wil hulle vir ons aanpak.”*

(Participant 8)

[“Say now my friend and I want to now hit this person then that one will fetch his gang and all these things, then they all want to attack us.”]

(Participant 8)

The following participants express their views on how prison gangs attain their power within prison, through the use of various gang activities or rituals.



*“...when you come to a gang now, now they say, now you must fist show what, what you can do and stuff like that. In prison they...they don't give you a gun, they give you a knife. They say, ja, you must go stab this one and go stab that one...they (gang) depend on each other's powers. In prison, if you not a gangster, stuff like that they say ja, you a dik Frans (big non-gangster) and stuff like that...but if, if you take a number, maybe number 28 or 26 then you...then they say ja you...your power is cut up...your power that you got is, is all the gang's powers...the whole gang's powers...it's, uh...it's just a number that you wear, that you got maybe on your arm or on your chest or something. That makes...uh...that makes a gangster powerful in prison.”*

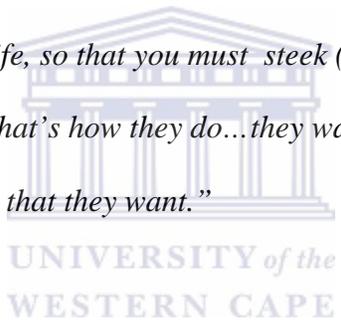
(Participant 2)

*“...because he’s a gangster you’re, you nothing. He makes the rules. You obey. That’s why I decided, no man, I don’t wanna be somebody else’s punching bag...I rather join the gang...at first it was like cool for me to join a gang, showing off, like I’m the man and stuff like that...there isn’t anybody that’s powerful here in prison. Like for instance, in my organisation (gang), there’s different ranks. It, it’s which rank you are, the highest rank, then you the most powerful...cause you got your soldiers (gang members) that’s looking after you...stuff like that”*

(Participant 3)

*“Because no one tells them (gangsters) what to do...they are big in prison...no one can tell them...you must join them and then they gonna give you the number (tattoo), you see... they gonna give you a knife, so that you must steek (stab) the chief (warder), you see, so you can be a gangster, that’s how they do...they want everybody must be afraid of them...they must get everything that they want.”*

(Participant 4)



All participants within the present study agreed that gangsterism was definitely linked to power within prison. Firstly, gangs were widely feared by other prisoners, due to their large numbers because standing up against a gangster, would lead to physical assault from the whole gang. According to Pinnock (1996), boys everywhere have a need for rituals marking a passage to manhood and if society does not provide them, they will inevitably invent their own.

Youth gangs work, if they did not, young people would create something else (Pinnock, 1996). And it is evident that prison gangs work for many incarcerated youth. It has become a medium for making prison bearable and livable. However, this usually happens at the expense of many victims. On numerous occasions the gang members are

called upon to show their power through the use of aggressive and violent acts.

Therefore, gangs are a huge factor increasing the level of danger within prison.

#### **4.13 Earning Respect in Prison**

Participants were asked how they earn respect within prison and various findings were discovered. Gangsters and non-gangsters alike expressed the need to earn respect in prison.

“As jy by hulle (gang) kom soos nou in die oggende dan moet jy eerste die nommerskap (number gang activities) se. Hulle respect jou in ‘n way, dan se hulle miskien, salute my gaazie (gang brother), dan moet jy sabella saam met hulle...dan respect hulle vir jou so.”

(Participant 9)

[“When you come to them (gang) like now in the mornings then you must first say the (number gang activities). They respect you in that way, then they maybe say salute my gang brother, then you must sabella (talk in gang language) with them...then they respect you like that.”]

(Participant 9)

“To give respect, you have to earn respect...that’s my motto, like the people that are nothing (non-gangsters), I respect them and they respect me. If they don’t respect me, I beat them.”

(Participant 3)

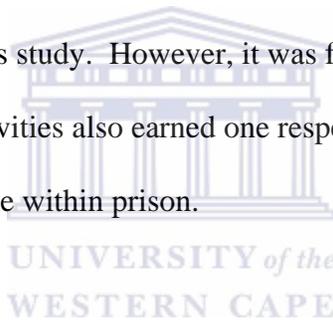
“There’s lots of ways man. Fighting and stuff like that and...showing them that I’m not scared and all this kind of gedoentes (things) man.”

(Participant 2)

A few participants mentioned that you could earn respect by becoming involved in church activities at the prison.

“Okay...if, if maybe you go to church and you respect them (fellow prisoners), they will also respect you, you see.” (Participant 4)

The last theme of this study was participants’ perceptions on earning respect in prison. Many expressed that respect is earned by showing ones loyalty and commitment to ones gang, through the applications of gang beliefs within ones life. It was also expressed that showing your aggressiveness earned you respect, which can be related to previous literature and themes within this study. However, it was further mentioned that involvement within church activities also earned one respect, even though there was a paucity of literature on this issue within prison.



The above mentioned themes involving gangs, power and earning respect in prison may also be linked to Fanon’s (1968) Theory of Violence. Fanon (1968), claims that the first facet of the colonial mindset to be rejected by the colonised in the event of revolution is individualism (Murphy, 2003). This is due to the fact that colonialism justifies its inhumanity with reference to a collective stereotype of the colonised as other, savage, inhuman and simultaneously refuse the concrete bonds existing between group members (Murphy, 2003). Therefore, once again, within the prison setting the colonised would be the prison youth who are stereotyped as savage or inhuman, often by both prison staff and wider society.

Fanon (1968) was interested in how the shame and self contempt that result from the experience of racial stereotyping, may manifest as intra-group violence (Murphy, 2003). According to Fanon (1968), it is only the power to create meaning and value for oneself that provides a remedy to what he names, the 'collective auto-destruction' of the colonised (Murphy, 2003). Therefore, prison gangs have constructed and maintained a militaristic system (similar to the prison authorities) for themselves for years, which is characterised by violence and brutality. This has created meaning and value for themselves within their harsh environment.

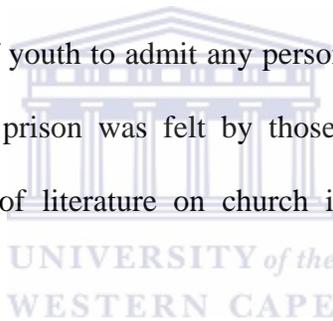
Fanon (1968) has stated that it is this double bind that he names an 'infernal-circle', which motivates his description of double alienation, where one is faced with equally deplorable options of embracing the culture of the coloniser (prison staff) or falling back into an identity that has been dehumanised (Murphy, 2003). This statement explains why so many prison youth join gangs, known for their military ascribed roles similar to the warders in prison, for power and respect because if you are not part of a gang you are viewed as a nothing, ultimately dehumanised. Thus, Fanon's work remains relevant to the South African context, and gives plausible explanations to the social phenomenon within this study. The following section will give a brief summary of all the major findings within this study.

#### **4.14 Summary of Findings and Discussion**

A common feeling among most participants was that they had bad experiences within prison including fighting, gang activities and loss of family. Even though sodomy was also viewed as one of the main negative aspects of prison life, most participants only

witnessed this happening to others. This theme is supported by the findings by Pelmos (2003), who stated that the rape of males is a serious, common problem in the institutions of confinement, such as prison and is even an accepted part of institutional life.

Further literature could support the finding that participants almost always witnessed sodomy but never experienced it themselves. Booyens, Hesselink-Louw & Mashabela (2004) proposes whereby that coerced sex in prison is not referred to as rape by the prisoners but as the “turning out” of a person. This is a non-sexual description of an act of conquest and emasculation of the victim, whereby the victim is regarded as weak and not worthy of respect from those who are ‘men’ (Booyens *et al.*, 2004). Therefore, this would explain the hesitation of youth to admit any personal experiences of sodomy. The only good positive aspect of prison was felt by those involved in church activities. However, there is a paucity of literature on church involvement and its effects on incarcerated youth.



It was found that all participants were perpetrators of aggression during their incarceration period. Stabbing fellow prisoners or even warders were often the acts of perpetration. It can be clearly stated that prison life has detrimental effects on youth, leading to greater forms of aggression and violence. However, many were also victims of aggression, often at the hands of gangsters or over resources such as food, cigarettes, clothes etc. A vast difference within aggressive behaviours by the youth was found before and within prison. Most participants stated that prison had made them more aggressive individuals. The main theme was that the prison environment made it harder to ignore threatening people and thus, it would lead them to become angry and aggressive as a form of defending themselves from harm.

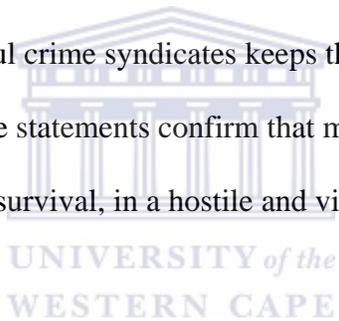
These themes were supported by literature stating that aggressive behaviours are often reactions to other prisoners' violent behaviours or threats towards them. Thus, the prison environment often leads many youth to become perpetrators of aggression. McLachlan (1984) cited in De Ridder (1996), states that due to the very nature of prisons, overcrowding, isolation from family, boredom and powerlessness, there is intense frustration, competition and rivalry within gangs themselves, as members fight for resources such as, new recruits, tobacco, dagga or sex. These circumstances often leads many youth to adopt aggressive behaviours as a coping mechanism.

The involvement, formation and roles of prison gangs were a major theme within the findings. It was often factors such as protection, coercive conformity, benefits and threatening to leave the gang that would spark aggression and violence within prison. This could be linked to the literature stating that, gang membership is voluntary, but gangs are powerful and due to overcrowding conditions, violent coercive conformity could and usually is employed (Dissel, 1996). Certain participants were involved in gangs before being incarcerated, since gangs are rife in the areas they come from. The roles of prison gangs are often viewed as militaristic and brutal, exacerbating violence. These extracts can be linked to the numerous literature, which states that, prison gangs generally have a coherent national organisation and militaristic structure that mimic the old South African Apartheid system in general and the prison administration in particular (De Ridder, 1996).

A major finding was that youth in prison often join gangs as a form of protection and power because they are so widely feared. This relates to the proposition that many young prisoners are forced to join gangs as a form of protection in prison (Dissel, 1996).

Aggression, gangsterism and prison violence were often interdependent, where the one influenced the other in an intertwined web of power and respect. These themes relate to literature stating that leaving a gang is often like signing a death warrant, since they are driven by the fear that a departing member may defect to a rival gang, thus they would rather kill him (Nott, Rosemary & Theron, 1990).

The themes relating to prison gangs were all supported by literature postulating that these gangs often become a rite of passage through the hallways and rooms of the enemy such as poverty, into the bosom of the admiring gang (Pinnock, 1996). In the desperation of the deteriorated communities as well as prison, peer admiration has a high value and the trickle-down from successful crime syndicates keeps the door from the wolf of poverty (Pinnock, 1996). These statements confirm that many youth often join gangs in prison as a form of coping and survival, in a hostile and violent environment.



However, two themes emerged as important as new contributions to the literature on youth in prison. Firstly, there was great importance linked to being placed in single cell accommodation by many participants. These cells were often viewed as a safe haven from danger or an escape from the adversities of prison life. Secondly, the other important theme which frequently arose was that prison staff often used physical punishment to discipline the youth. A paucity of literature on these areas were found. These findings remain extremely important and is a crucial new contribution to literature and should be explored further with future research.

Lastly, it is evident that the use of aggression as a form of power with the incarceration of youth is a phenomenon, which is widely practiced. The major findings within this study

portray the experiences by youth in Pollsmoor Prison, but may be related to numerous juvenile sections throughout other prisons in South Africa. It is evident that future research should be directed to this disturbing social phenomena.



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **5.1 Violence, Aggression and the Prison**

It is clear that the problem of prison violence and offender aggression is linked to the previous oppressive policies practiced in South Africa. This should be taken into consideration when researching aggressive behaviours of juveniles as a form of power in the adverse prison gang setting. Therefore this research is pivotal to this country's justice system as well as the broader society. The findings of this study have shown that aggression and violence are often interdependent and closely related to the organisation of prison gangs among incarcerated youth. Due to the adverse conditions within many of South Africans prisons, youth usually adopt aggressive and violent tendencies as a medium to cope with their lot. Moreover, it is the very acts of aggression and violence through gang activities that lead to the attainment of power among this population. These disturbing findings has raised awareness on this social phenomenon for future research.

#### **5.2 Theoretical Implications**

Fanon's theory of violence (1968) appears to be extremely relevant to the major findings within this study. His main arguments are that an individual's oppressive past history continues to contribute to the adoption of violence as a coping mechanism. This is of particular importance to the oppressed and disadvantaged communities exposed to prolonged social oppression. In the case of South Africa, this is the communities

previously disadvantaged by apartheid and in this case prison youth. His theories of vertical and horizontal as well as structural, institutional and personal violence, has proven to be extremely relevant within the South African prison context. His work has remained useful in understanding the adoption and application of aggression as a form of power among incarcerated youth.

Fanon's (1968) explanation of how individuals are socialised into structural violence through various oppressive mediums within society, parallels the socio-economic history of inequity of the majority of youth in prison. The prison environment is probably one of the most important examples of institutional violence, which has been supported by the findings of this study, where basic rights such as protection from prison authorities, education, food, recreation, and good living conditions are not practiced. These adverse conditions often lead to many acts of aggression and violence among incarcerated youth, supporting Fanon's (1968) theory personal violence (Bulhan, 1985).

The themes involving gangs, power and earning respect in prison may also be linked to Fanon's theory of violence (1968). His statements that colonialism justifies its inhumanity with reference to a collective stereotype of the colonised as other, savage, inhuman and simultaneously refuse the concrete bonds existing between group members (Murphy, 2003). Within the prison setting the colonised would be the prison youth who are stereotyped as savage or inhuman, often by both prison staff and wider society. Fanon (1968) believed that the shame felt through this stereotyping may lead to intra-group violence (Murphy, 2003). These statements justify the formulation of prison gangs who adopted similar roles as the military and warders and are characterised by violence

and brutality. The gangs are merely an effort by youth to create meaning and value for themselves within the harsh prison environment.

It is consummately evident that many prison youth join gangs for power and respect. Due to the violent nature of the prison youth population, and where they originate, it is evident that Fanon's theory of social oppression and violence (1968) has portrayed valuable insights into the dynamics of this phenomena. His work remains pivotal in the understanding of the use of aggression as a form of power among incarcerated youth.

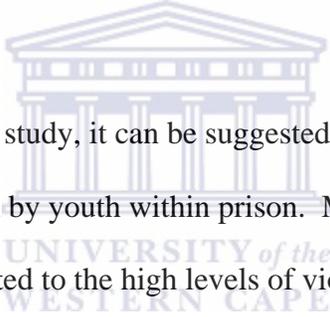
### **5.3 Limitations of the Study**

Due to the difficult environment in which this research was conducted, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the study. The limited sample size influences the nature of reliability and validity and consequently, the generalisability of the study. The fact that I was a female interviewer, may have hampered the responses of the participants and has to be taken into account. One of the findings was that some of the youth often lied about their age in court, saying that they were younger, when they were in fact over 18 years of age. This was done so that they could be sent to the juvenile section of the prison. This could also have hampered the findings, however, it remains an important issue to consider, since it is often the younger youth who become victims of violence and aggression, by these older youth within the cells of the prison, which in turn increases the level of aggression and violence within prison as a whole. This in turn supports the major aim of this study, where youth may use aggression as a form of power to cope with this type of environment.

#### **5.4 Significance of Study**

The findings within this study has portrayed important issues on aggression, power, prison violence and gangs among incarcerated youth, which may be used for further research within South Africa, or internationally, to ameliorate these problems. This study may raise awareness within our society on the incarcerated youth population within our country. It has given these children a chance to express their experiences and views, in the hope that we as a nation may finally hear their voices and act on them.

#### **5.5 Recommendations**



Considering the findings of this study, it can be suggested that further research be focused to the use of aggression by youth within prison. Moreover, the development of prison gangs is strongly connected to the high levels of violence among this incarcerated population and should be an area of focus for all individuals working within this environment. However, society should be aware of the fact that youth in prison often join gangs in order to cope with the harsh and dangerous conditions of their environment.

Another important recommendation is that attention should be given to the practices of prison authorities, as a continuously emerging theme was that physical punishment from staff were often enforced to discipline the youth. The youth also felt that there was a lack of protection from staff and many had to protect themselves from the violent environment of prison. However, staff members were working under extreme conditions of overcrowding at the time of this study, making it extremely difficult to keep all the

youth safe at all times. This is an extremely disturbing finding and should be given the necessary attention from researchers within the field.

Due to this lack of protection from prison staff, linked to poor living conditions, the only escape from harm was usually the request to be placed within a single cell. Participants often felt that they were less aggressive when they were not in the overcrowded cells, where fighting would break out regularly among the youth. Therefore, this could also be an important area to research within the near future.

Finally, a small number of participants mentioned that being involved in church activities was viewed as one, if not the only positive aspect, experienced within the prison. Church leaders were role models to certain individuals, making this a prominent area to research within the prison setting. It was discovered that certain participants even participated in church activities to be respected by their fellow inmates or to be safe from harm within prison. Thus, religious activities within prison is an area where much focus is needed. These recommendations will hopefully help professionals gain insight, into the areas needing immediate attention within the prison system in South Africa.

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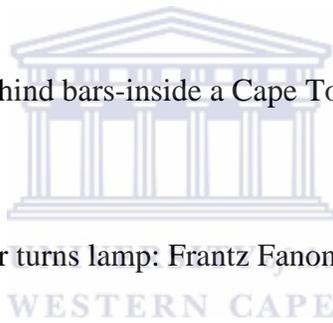
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## APPENDIX: 1

### SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

After establishing rapport and obtaining biographical information, the following questions were asked:

1. Tell me about your experiences in prison?
2. How has prison changed your life?
3. What have you learnt after being in prison?
4. Have you ever acted in an aggressive way towards another person in prison?  
Explain?
5. How did you deal with people that were aggressive towards you before you came to prison?
6. How do you deal with aggressive people towards you now in prison?
7. Is there a difference between these ways? Explain?
8. Are you part of a gang? Why?
9. Why do you think gangs are formed in prison?
10. What are the roles of gangs in prison?
11. Why do youth join gangs in prison?
12. Tell me about your experiences of prison violence?
13. Among the prisoners, who has the most control?
14. How can you become powerful in prison?
15. How do you earn respect?
16. What message would you give to a young boy who is free outside, about Pollsmoor Prison?

## APPENDIX: 2

### BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS

#### Participant 1:

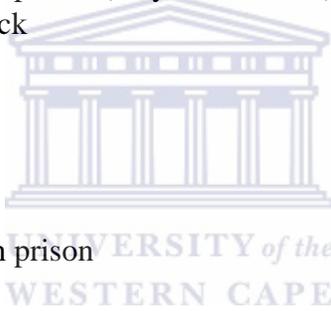
- Age: 17 years
- Offence: Murder, theft
- Length: 4 years in prison
- Area: Mitchells Plain

#### Participant 2:

- Age: 17 years
- Offence: Murder, theft
- Length: 4 years in prison (12 year sentence)
- Area: Woodstock

#### Participant 3:

- Age: 17 years
- Offence: Murder
- Length: 3 years in prison
- Area: Retreat



#### Participant 4:

- Age: 17 years
- Offence: Armed robbery
- Length: 15 years when committed the crime, sent to reformatory school (for 1 year). At Pollsmoor for 1 year.
- Area: Stellenbosch

#### Participant 5:

- Age: 14 years
- Offence: Housebreaking
- Length: 9 months in prison
- Area: Heideveld

Participant 6:

- Age: 15 years
- Offence: housebreaking
- Length: 1 month in prison
- Area: Eikefontein

Participant 7:

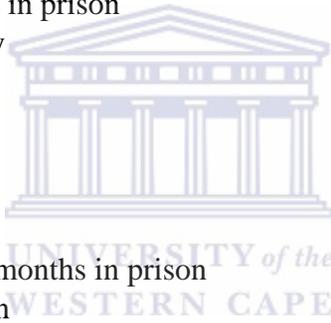
- Age: 16 years
- Offence: Car breaking and attempted murder
- Length: 2 months in prison
- Area: Kensington

Participant 8:

- Age: 16 years
- Offence: Housebreaking
- Length: 7 months in prison
- Area: Hout Bay

Participant 9:

- Age: 16 years
- Offence: Rape
- Length: 1 year 4 months in prison
- Area: Milnerton



Participant 10:

- Age: 15 years
- Offence: Attempted car theft
- Length: 1 year in prison
- Area: Milnerton

Participant 11:

- Age: 14 years
- Offence: Unlicensed firearm
- Length: 1 year in prison
- Area: Crossroads

Participant 12:

- Age: 15 years
- Offence: Car breaking, armed robbery
- Length: 1 year in prison
- Area: Hanover Park



## APPENDIX: 3

### SAMPLE OF TRANSCRIBED SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

#### Interview with participant 1:

I: Tell me about your experiences in prison?

P1: My experiences in prison. Um. Hectic man. It's unexplainable.

I: Why?

P1: Because you see a lot of things happen. You get used to it.

I: Things like what?

P1: Good things, bad things. Evil things, any kind of things.

I: And how do you handle it?

P1: How do I handle it? I take it as it comes.

I: Can you maybe explain what you see, or...Some of the stuff, like the bad stuff.

P1: The bad stuff, yor!!...it's a lot of bad stuff man. Stabbings, sodomising...any kinda stuff.

I: Does it happen every day?

P1: It happens every day.

I: How do you cope with it?

P1: How do I cope with that? I defend myself.

I: How do you defend yourself?

P1: How...um..

I: Like in what ways?

P1: You learn a lot in prison man. You learn how to manipulate. Positive, negative, any kind of manipulation. You see.

I: So its all in the mind.

P1: Ja.

I: Have you ever acted in an aggressive way towards another prisoner?

P1: Ja

I: Can you explain to me what happened?

P1: I stabbed the person, because why...you see in the prison is... There's gangs here, three gangs, 26, 27, 28. now I belong to the 26 organization. Now, the 28's is known for their... for their, how can I say...known for their raping, stuff like that man. The 26's and the 27's, they are mostly, how can I say? We...um..it's like...if a new person comes

here we will always try to take him cause we know what will happen to him if he goes to the 28's. not to put the 28's in a bad light, but it is just like that. How can I say. We fight over new people that comes 'cause we build our, how can I say, we build our gang stronger with him.

I: So what happens if the person doesn't want to join the gang?

P1: What happens?...um...

I: Like if the person comes and he says no he doesn't wanna be a gangster, then what?

P1: No. he can't say he don't wanna be a gangster.

I: Why?

P1: He'll maybe walk with his head full of shit. They'll hit him to a pulp man and the police will take him and rather put him on a safe place like in the tanker here, stuff like that.

I: So you never safe if you not a gangster?

P1: You not safe if you a gangster also man, cause you never know who's been planning on you.

I: But is it better to be a gangster in prison?

P1: For survival, ja!

I: When you say survival, what do you mean to survive?

P1: Ja, this place is the survival of the fittest. See, if you gonna let this person use you to do anything man then you gonna make yourself a target cause everybody's gonna do it. If you give one person the strength to come into you just????.....

I: So what must you do?

P1: Defend yourself.

I: How?

P1: By being aggressive, anything.

I: Is it important to be aggressive?

P1: Yes, it's very important.

I: Why?

P1: Because that's a defence mechanism man, it defends you.

I: How did you deal with people that were aggressive towards you before you came to prison?

P1: Before?... I shot somebody man and went to prison. I belonged to a gang on the outside also.

I: How do you deal with aggressive people now, in prison? Is there a difference?

P1: Now in prison?

I: Of how you used to treat people and now.

P1: Ja, there is a difference because the cops is tight. So you do, you do the stuff more...sneakier man, without them knowing.

I: But would you say that prison made you more aggressive?

P1: Uh (Yes)

I: Why?

P1: Because, you...all this. You have stress you know. There's a lot of stuff man. You stress a lot. You want to go home and you miss your people and, uh it's a lot of stuff. And here's this somebody coming now. He's, he's make like me. I'm going now back to room...I'm gonna tell the guys now, jy wat kan maak, ek was nou da by dy twee... en lyne en sien jy nou. Now, I'm gonna tell them now. Hey, I were here. Now he don't wanna listen to this because this sounds now to him man. He would rather be in my shoes to be here now. So it is man. So everything that you see and do, you keep it for yourself.

I: But you have to be aggressive all the time?

P1: Ja, not all the time. There is times where there's jokes made and stuff like that, but nobody knows each other man. We all form different kinds of places and now we have to how can I say, intergrate with each other and learn to know each other now. I don't let a person to know how I am cause I won't talk a lot to him. Maybe he's my 26 brother. Ahwhere, salut, hosh, pakameesa, kla. Now I won't still talk and eh...en praat en dinge, en lyne. Hauh, that not me. You get that, that's so but I'm already long at, at Pollsmoor man now I, I, how can I say. I sit at the back of the room and I can read the room and I can say exactly jey, that is gonna happen to that person because that person is talking to you a lot. He's gonna go to the toilet and he's gonna get stabbed. You can see the atmosphere changes man. It's mos lots of people. There's lots a lot of minds.

I: Unpredictable?

P1: Ja, it's unpredictable, but you can predict it. That's if you long....

I: If you there long?

P1: Ja, say you sleeping in one room cause all the rooms are different. Maybe I'm sleeping already two years in this room. People went home, came in, came home, I'm still here. Now I can read the room. I can tell exactly what is going to happen, stuff like that.

I: So before you came to prison you were obviously a different person. So were you more aggressive outside before you came to prison?

P1: I wasn't so aggressive outside.

I: Why?

P1: Because...I wasn't so aggressive.

I: Not necessary?

P1: Uh

I: Now why's it necessary here?

P1: Because it's a defence thingy man.

I: In what ways have you changed while in prison?

P1: In what ways. Mentally I've changed.

I: Can you explain?

P1: You see it's mos. Is aneste hier in die trunk. (It's different here in prison). Sien jy. (you see). As ek loop da en ek sien. (If I walk there I can see who's my 26 brother, 27, 28 or a Frans. I can see him out. So it is here.

I: How can you see him out?

P1: Is a mind thing. Everything is in the mind. This whole system. It's either 26, 27. I, I don't know about the 28, but it's in their mind. This whole system, because we also have a system like this in our, in our gang.

I: So obviously you part of a gang. So why did you join a gang?

P1: Join, to defend myself.

I: Is it important to be part of a gang?

P1: Mm...to come to prison.

I: I mean to survive. Is it important?

P1: To survive, ja, it's important.

I: So why do you think gangs are formed in prison?

P1: To push time man.

I: What do you mean?

P1: To push time...But there are different reasons also man. Maybe reasons is that...Maybe, I, I'm mos from Mitchells Plain man and your brother comes here. He's in the room. We in the same room. I won't let, see that he get sore man, stuff like that. Homeza, homeza (gangster) stuff man. If you from Mitchells plain, naai (no). Is da by my. (It's there by me).

I: Now does it work by area?

P1: It works like that also, but it's not suppose to work like that, but it's 2006. is the year of the 26's...It's madness man.

I: What are the roles of gangs in prison?

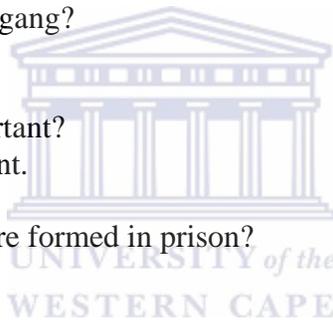
P1: They have different roles, like all this guards here you see here in prison, they have all their roles.

I: Can you maybe explain?

P1: Hoe kan ek se man (how can I say man)...The military, we have generals, we have everything. Sergeants, sergeant majors, everything we have.

I: So how do you become higher in the ranks?

P1: You work you up.



I: How do you work you up?

P1: You...It depends what gang you are. See 26, everybody mos know money, 27 blood, 28 is sy ding (his thing). Now is.. you work you up like that man.

I: What do you have to do to be powerful in a gang?

P1: Knowledge.

I: Is it also the way you act?

P1: Um..Ja. You have to be a role model man.

I: How?

P1: To the other soldate. So man.

I: How are you a role model? What makes you more powerful?

P1: By showing them I'll stab someone in front of the police. Then the police will hit me to a pulp and I'll just lay there maybe. Ok they will look after me. We have a...a hospital also. We have everything. It's like we don't need the system. We have a system ourself in prison.

I: So you protect each other?

P1: Ja. We protect each other.

I: Why do you think the youth in prison, why do they join gangs?

P1: Why do they join gangs? Because it is so on tv. Everything like that man. You see.

I: What is so on tv?

P1: 50 cent en dinge en lyne. It maak die laaities, hulle raak mal buite. Die laaities wil wies soos 50 cent. Sy keppie is skief en dinge en lyne. See its that man.

P1: (50 cent and things and lines. It makes the boys, they go mad outside. The boys want to be like 50 cent. His cap is skew and things and lines).

I: But now what makes...Say a young boy comes to prison for the first time and he's not a gangster and they ask him what you wanna be. What do you think makes him join the gang?

P1: Discipline you see. Because there is a room where there's no gangsters, but it messed up man. Because everybody don't worry about nothing man. They just doing their own thing, everybody. So you get into fights quickly. Now in...in die ouense (gangsters) se kamer, jy kry nie bakleiery nie (you don't get fighting) man.

I: What is ouense?

P1: Ja, my beddas (brothers)...sien (see)...You don't still get fighting there man...so quickly. If there break a fight out then it's a big fight. Now everything is just...Nobody fights with each other, nobody swears at each other. Because they know it's. we have...how can I say, rules also man. You not allowed to swear at your brother. You not

allowed to harm him or...you must always be on the lookout for him. Wherever he goes, you must watch him and stuff like that man.

I: Um...what are the main causes of prison violence?

P1: What are the main causes of prison violence? The sodomising and the, everything man. It's mostly the sodomising because...is...it's the number, is history way back. It repeats itself man.

I: Do you think gangs are the main causes of prison violence?

P1: Gangs are the main cause of prison violence. Haah. You see gangs in prison is not actually gangsters man. Is...is history repeats itself man.

I: What do you mean?

P1: You see...uhmm...if I go back to 1812 there was a man. Okay I don't still wanna talk the stuff because this is private stuff, but I'm...but it's unexplainable and I don't wanna talk this stuff here man.

I: Do you think it's a good thing that there's gangs in prison, to put it that way?

P1: A good thing, ja.

I: Why?

P1: To keep everything in order. Because if there wasn't gangs nuh...this prison would have been like OZ. See the prison on OZ. It would have been like that. Everybody doing their own thing. Everybody's just for themselves and it can't be like that man. If they bored they gonna fight each other so there must be one leader.

I: So ther must be weak ones and powerful ones?

P1: Umm...not actually man, weak ones and powerful ones. You can be how weak man. You learn the, the things of the prison and how to go about things and how to go about things.

I: Do they teach you how to be aggressive?

P1: Not aggressive, but to defend yourself man. Like if somebody comes to you, he just stabbed someone, now he gives the knife to you. Now you stand with the knife. What you gonna do with the knife? Here the cops come. They catch you. Stuff like that man.

I: They teach them how to...

P1: Ja, you musn't do, you must think before you do something man. Now they catch him. They hit him in his glory but he done nothing.

I: So you basically...you come here, you get taught how to behave like a prisoner or a gangster?

P1: Ja

I: What qualities do you think a prisoner who is powerful has?

P1: A lot of qualities man.

I: Like what?

P1: He's got the power to change everybody man.

I: How?

P1: Cause he have the power.

I: How does he get the power?

P1: Yor, ek...hoe kan ek se? jy moet a .....??

I: What does that.....??

P1: Like a.....?? Like all this wardens, they know me already man. They know what am I capable of doing and how aggressive I can be and stuff like that. First, if they used to lock me up then they lock me up and they don't wanna let me come out. Then I will hit someone's head open...so man.

I: So...to you, you must be aggressive to get out.

P1: It is, you must be aggressive man.

I: Is that what.....?? Expect and earning power

P1: That's it man.

I: So you look up to other prisoners that...that do stuff like that

P1: Mm (Yes).

I: So what happens to...

P1: I don't look up to prisoners. I do my thing man. I got my label that I am. There are maybe people higher than me, but the label that I am nobody tells me, not even the people above me, cause I have my own label here. You see.

I: So, you like, in charge?

P1: Ja. Maybe there will come orders down to tell me, jey, um... stuff is gonna happen like this, that, that, that, then I just tell the people under me, jey, stuff is gonna happen like this man and so it will work.

I: So it's like a whole power thing...the levels?

P1: Ja...the chain of command...so.

I: Now what happens...the ones that you in charge of?

P1: The ones I'm in charge of?

I: Mm...are they like...do you teach them how to...do you teach them how to defend themselves?

P1: Ja.

I: And if someone doesn't want to defend themselves then what happens to them?

P1: Um...the first day that he comes into the room man...and he, he was never in prison...the 28,s will try to grab him first because...we go fetch him first and and we ask him where he lives. We ask him what is he in prison. Is he a Frans and what, what. Now we tell him his a Frans. We all lie to him and tell him he belongs here man.

Because you get a skoon Frans. Is...is somebody that...that's nothing in prison man. He got nothing in prison.

I: What do you mean nothing?

P1: He belongs to nobody, so anybody can grab him before they grab him we grab him. Many that come in they always think we, we try to use them and making them washing machines, and stuff like like that man, but it isn't like that. We wanna keep them out of there cause we know what's going on there. Now one day when they become one of us, maybe then they'll see this stuff...but they know nothing. Lot of them, they make the mistake. They jump and they will fight maybe. Take us out, everybody to the single cells, stuff like that.

I: So if you not a gangster, then life is hard for you?

P1: Ja

I: Umm...what would earn you respect among your fellow prisoners?

P1: Earn me respect?

I: How would you earn respect from others?

P1: There's lots of ways man. Fighting and stuff like that and....showing them that I'm not scared and all this kind of gedoentes (things) man.

I: The other thing. You know you get guys that are soft, that don't like to fight, by nature. So what happens to them in prison?

P1: Maybe them...they sleep for one night in the room. The next morning they tell the chief. Chief I don't wanna sleep here anymore because it's too ruff and stuff. Take me to the single cells. Now they take them to the single cells. It's like that.

I: Because the way it sounds it's...

P1: It's hectic man. I can't talk the stuff cause its gonna put a toe (rope) on my neck. No matter I'm sitting alone here man. This prison got mos eyes man. See.

I: Is there anything else you would like to say?

P1: Is okay man. I don't still want to talk alot.

I: That's fine. Thank you.

END